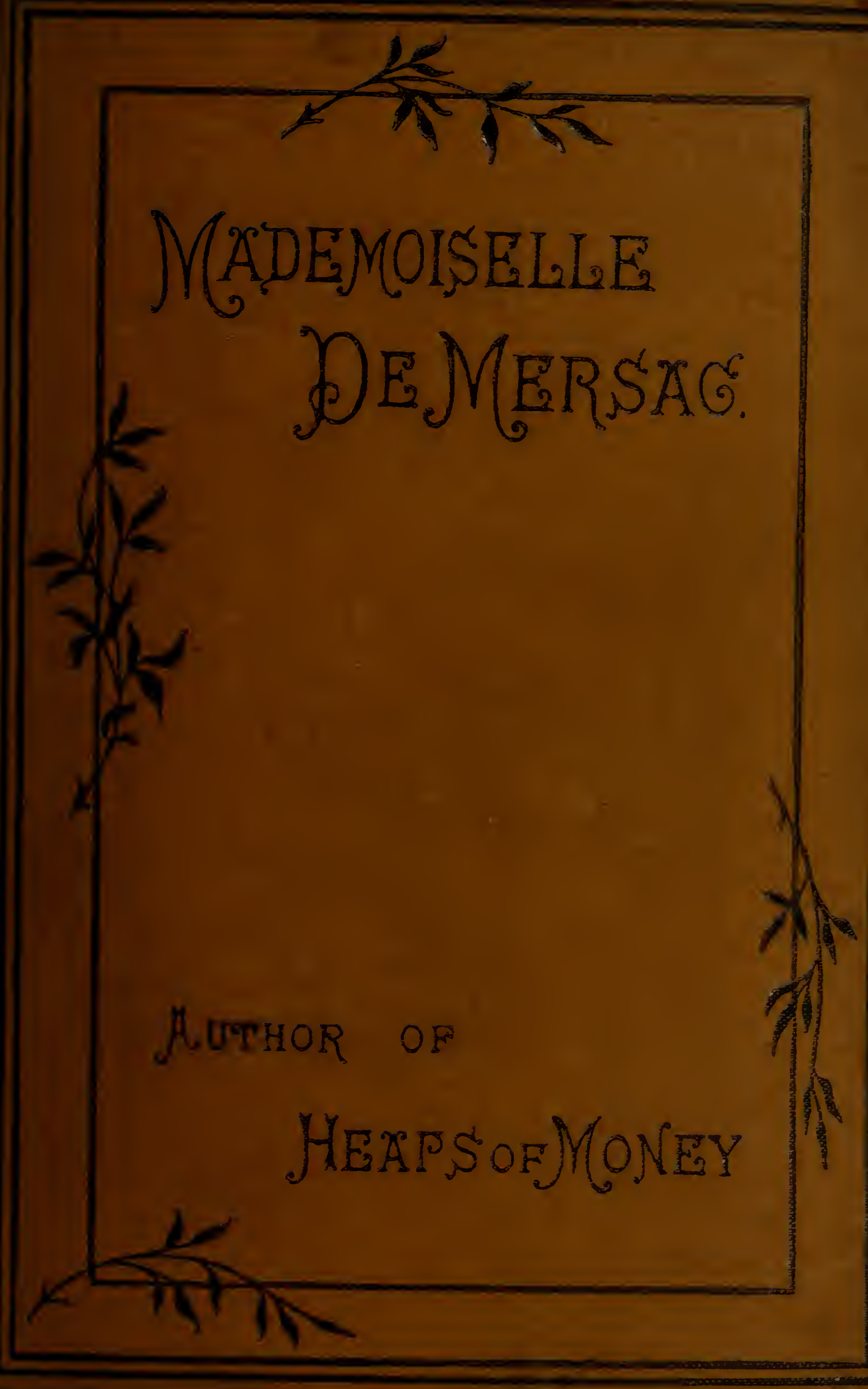
MADEMOISELLE
DE MERSAC.
AUTHOR OF
HEAPS OF MONEY

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MADEMOISELLE DE MERSAC

VOL. I.

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MADEMOISELLE DE MERSAC

BY

W. E. NORRIS

AUTHOR OF 'HEAPS OF MONEY'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1880

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MADEMOISELLE DE MERSAC.

CHAPTER I.

THE ANCIENT FAMILY OF DE MERSAC.

Beside a hedge of prickly cactus and spiked aloes, a tall dark-haired girl stood erect and motionless. She was shading her eyes with her hand, and gazing intently at some distant object. From the point at which she had taken up her station the ground fell away in stony watercourses and wooded ravines, till, far beneath, a silvery line of foam marked the shore of the wide expanse of blue sea which stretched away from it to meet the horizon. Behind her was a large garden, in which feathery bamboos, ragged bananas, and tall palms were intermingled with plants and flowers more familiar to English eyes; and directly at her back a rugged old almond-tree spread over her its branches loaded with bloom, but as yet

bare of leaves ; for the season was the month of February, and Northern Europe was still hard frozen or dreary with gales and driving rain, though here in Algeria the roses were in bloom, and the air was full of the scent of spring.

Bareheaded she stood under the African sun, a graceful, majestic figure ; and the breeze, as it swept in fitfully from the seaward, set the rosy almond-blossoms flying, and dropped a stray one now and again upon her abundant dark tresses. As to the fact of her beauty there could be no question ; but there could be, and indeed was, a considerable divergence of opinion as to its attractiveness—those of her own sex generally according her their tribute of admiration without stint, whereas men, while admitting that in form and feature she was as perfect as an old Greek statue, sometimes complained that she was almost as cold, and that for so young a girl she was too impassive and self-possessed to be fascinating. To be fascinating was assuredly not one of her aspirations ; that much might be guessed by the most superficial of physiognomists from the proud pose of her small, well-shaped head, from the slightly drawn-up nostril, above all from the serene composure of her curved lips. The owner of such a

face could no more be capable of coquetry than Pallas Athenè. Noble she might be, or clever, or generous; but captivating never—unless, indeed, qualities more captivating than the ordinary might, by such as were at the pains to seek for them, be found lying far beneath that calm surface, as pearls lie hid in depths of the Southern Ocean.

Presently an old woman in a white linen cap came out of the house, which stood some hundred yards or so in the background, and peered about her, blinking in the blaze of the sunlight.

'Mademoiselle Jeanne!' she called, in a high-pitched quavering voice.

'I am here, Fanchette,' answered the girl, without changing her position.

The old woman advanced slowly, dragging her list slippers over the gravel.

'Madame la Duchesse sends to say that she is not feeling well, and will breakfast in her own room,' she announced. 'Will you be served now, mademoiselle?'

'Not yet,' answered the girl. 'The steamer is in sight, Fanchette.'

'Where, then? I see nothing. Ah, that speck in the distance! *Eh, mon Dieu!* mademoiselle, you are never thinking of waiting for M. Léon!

Two hours it will be, at the very least, before the steamer gets into harbour; and then there is the custom-house—they will not hurry themselves for king or peasant, those lazy *douaniers*. If M. Léon gets home by three o'clock, I shall be astonished—and you have eaten nothing since seven!'

'I shall have the better appetite, Fanchette,' said the girl, turning and looking down upon the old servant with grave, brown, not unkindly eyes.

'Appetite? That is precisely where you are deceived, mademoiselle. Appetite is a good thing; but hunger is a bad one. Neglect your stomach when you are young, and it will refuse to serve you when you are old—that is what my father used to say; and he was a man full of good sense, my father.'

'I don't doubt it, Fanchette; but it will not hurt me to fast for a few hours, just for once.'

'Who knows? You have hardly done growing yet; and "just once" may be just once too often. If you were a little girl still, I would say, "Jeanne, go in and eat your breakfast, and don't argue with those who are four times your age, and know better than you what is good for you."'

'But, as I am not a little girl any more, I suppose I must have my own way, Fanchette,' observed the young lady, with a smile.

'Oh! without doubt; we all have the right to do silly things, as soon as we are out of the nursery. Come, mademoiselle, come in and eat. M. Léon shall not starve when he arrives—it is I who promised it you.'

'Thank you, Fanchette; but I think I would rather wait.'

'What for, *bon Dieu?* When he comes, you will find, most likely, that he has breakfasted on board; and so long as you have him with you, what difference can it make whether you eat with him or not?'

'I should prefer to wait.'

Fanchette knew by experience that when her young mistress spoke in that tone further insistance was useless; so she shrugged her shoulders silently, and slowly made her way back towards the house, into which she presently vanished.

The house was one of a type not uncommon in the neighbourhood of Algiers. Having been in the old corsair days which seemed so remote, but which are still well within the memory of living men, the country residence of some wealthy Moor,

it had, at a later period, been altered and added to so as to meet the requirements of a French family of the present day; that is to say, that a modern villa, plain, tile-roofed, and uncompromising, had been tacked, without rhyme or reason, or any sense of the fitness of things, on to one end of it; —whereby it had gained much in comfort, and lost as much in beauty. Yet no one could say that the house was an ugly one. Artists, architects, and *dilettanti* were wont, after they had duly admired the horseshoe arches, the twisted marble pillars, the arabesques, and the blue glazed tiles of the older part of the building, to shake their heads and sadly moan over the civilised barbarism which had affixed thereto an oblong and unornamented excrescence with large windows, green *persiennes*, and a red roof; but, if they were honest men and hard pressed, could not deny that the general effect of the structure was not so bad as by rights it should have been. Sometimes, indeed, when sitting after dinner, in the garden, over a bottle of old Burgundy, while the slant rays of the setting sun fell full upon the white walls, and the sky beyond the Bouzaréah was all aglow, they could be brought to concede that even the modern part of the edifice was not wholly devoid

of a certain picturesqueness of its own; but it was redeemed from ugliness (they would explain in such moments) by three things only—firstly, by honest incongruity, no attempt (which must needs have proved futile) having been made by the French builder to assimilate his work to that which Moors alone could accomplish; secondly, by whitewash, which, under the African sun, takes from shadow such soft and delicate tints that the meanest of buildings are beautified by it; and thirdly, by a universal mantle of creepers—jasmine, Banksia rose, and purple Bougainvillea—the last a very gorgeous and luxuriant plant, for which, let us hope, a less clumsy name may, at some future time, be discovered.

But, whatever may have been the merits or demerits of the building itself, there could be no two opinions as to the loveliness of its position. For it stood high on a breezy upland, the swelling hills of the Sahhel on its right, the sea far beneath on its left, and in front a foreground of palm and umbrella pines; the heights of the Fort l'Empereur hiding the old robber city which they command, for middle distance; and beyond, a glimpse of the wide Bay of Algiers; and beyond that, again, the blue, snow-capped mountains of

Kabylia melting into the sky. Behind the house were fields of corn and maize, backed by a stretch of broken ground, overgrown with palmetto, which swelled into hills and culminated in the headland called the Bouzaréah, behind whose shoulder the sun sank every evening into a peaceful saffron sky, flecked with tiny gold cloudlets, or into an angry reddening storm-rack, sailing up from the Atlantic, according as the seasons and the wind were.

Algiers, alas! is becoming fashionable. The Grand Army which annually sets out from London, Petersburg, New York, and other cities upon its invasion of the once peaceful Riviera has for some years past been pushing reconnoitring parties into Africa—parties which would doubtless have waxed numerically stronger but for the inveterate turbulence of the Gulf of Lyons. The prospect of forty-eight hours, more or less, of sea-sickness—a very terrible contingency to most Continental minds—has hitherto prevented Algiers from being converted into a second Nice, and will probably continue to do so, in spite of its undoubted superiority of climate; but, happily for the Algerian hotel-keepers—unhappily perhaps for sundry unsociable individuals—British matrons and maidens are less

afraid of the sea; and thus it has come to pass that the Rue Bab-Azoun and the Place du Gouvernement have added to their accustomed motley crowd of costumes—turbaned Moors, white-robed Arabs, scowling Spaniards, Maltese sailors, grinning negroes, and a dozen other quaintly-assorted types—a considerable sprinkling of the ulsters, puggarees, sealskin jackets, and Mother-Hubbard hats, by means of which our countrymen and countrywomen are wont to exhibit their appreciation of the picturesque element in dress. During the winter months these good people not only fill the few hotels of the town, but overflow into the surrounding country. The wooded hill-side on the eastern arm of the great bay, with its innumerable white villas, swarms with them; and if they have to pay somewhat highly for their accommodation, no doubt they get the value of their money; for these villas, nestling amid orange groves, palms, aloes, and cypresses, and looking out upon a prospect of glittering city, blue sea, and distant mountains, form as near an approach to fairyland as can be obtained within four days' journey of our bleak shores.

It is not, however, in this fashionable suburb of Mustapha Supérieur that the particular

house with which we are concerned is to be found. To get to it you must either pass beyond that district, and, reaching the top of the hill, strike across the promontory towards the northern shore; or, starting from Algiers by the Bab-el-Oued—the Western Gate—you must mount a steep, winding road, bordered with acacias, and, leaving the town below you on the left, gain the little village of El-Biar. Then, after following the level high-road for ten minutes or so, you will see a high white garden wall and wooden folding gates, through which, if you penetrate, you will find yourself in the garden of the Campagne de Mersac. Looked upon merely as a winter residence, it can hardly compare with its neighbours of Mustapha, being colder and more exposed than they; but, on the other hand, it is fresher in the hot season, and it has also—what the villas of Mustapha have not—a very respectable property attached to it. Many acres of fertile land stretch away behind it, inland, from which the owners, after contending for a quarter of a century against much difficulty and disappointment, may be said to have reaped, upon the whole, an encouraging result.

Thither in the year 1845, or thereabouts, had

come one Charles Léon, Marquis de Mersac, hoping to find in the pursuit of agriculture in the young colony at once peace and occupation for the remaining years of a life which had hitherto been passed amid more storms and troubles than fall to the lot of most men. He purchased his land—land which, as his reading had told him, had once been as fertile as any in the world, but which had now lain waste, or nearly so, for centuries—set himself manfully to struggle against infinite natural difficulties, irrepressible growth of useless palmetto, want of labour, siroccos, locusts, and many other stubborn enemies which need not be enumerated here; and, in the end, achieved a fair measure of success. He met with a good deal of what is generally called bad luck; but this did not disappoint, or, at any rate, did not discourage him.

'Disappointment—*ça me connaît!*' he would often say, with a smile and a shrug. 'Misfortune and I are old acquaintances, and know how to meet without quarrelling. After all, it is only a question of habit. Sailors sleep quietly in a gale of wind which frightens landsmen out of their senses; and I am too much accustomed to failure to be scared by it.' So before his death the Marquis de Mersac

had become a prosperous farmer, which is a rare phenomenon in Algeria even at the present day.

For this result he was indebted partly, no doubt, to his possession of a moderate amount of capital, but in a much greater degree to his indomitable perseverance and spirit, which carried him over obstacles that would have disheartened a man of weaker will. But for this resolute temperament, indeed, he must have fainted far earlier in his career; for he had seen little but adversity ever since that dim winter's morning at the close of the last century, when, as a child of eight years old, he had been roused from his bed by his pale, affrighted mother, and, after a long journey over miry roads and through a country blazing into anarchy, had been taken on board a small sailing-boat bound for Dover. His father, a three-parts ruined nobleman, who had held some office about the court of Louis XVI., took a gloomy old house at Hampstead; and there it was that the young Charles grew up to manhood, and received such education as his parents could afford him. The old Marquis seems to have borne ill-fortune with that mixture of petulance and dignity which is the peculiar characteristic of his nation. Proud, narrow-minded, hating England and the English,

he uttered no complaint, but accepted his long years of exile merely as bad moments to be passed through in silence and patience; refused all hospitality, being unable to return it; and lived the life of a hermit, looking forward always to a brighter future, when right should triumph over wrong, the good old times return, and the king come to his own again. In the great Revolution which had swept away for ever the old order of things in his own land, and was bidding fair to effect a like transformation all over Europe, he saw only a successful uprising of the *bas peuple;* and knowing his compatriots—or believing he knew them—as he did, he never felt a moment's doubt of the ephemeral nature of the new Republic. Nor did the rise of the Empire occasion him any fresh misgivings. Sometimes, indeed, the news of one of Napoleon's victories would elicit from him a few angry expressions of contempt for the theatrical *farceur* (to use his own expression) who had dubbed himself Emperor of the French; but that an obscure Corsican upstart should ever be able to establish a dynasty permanently upon the throne of the Bourbons was a proposition too absurd to merit refutation.

In serene expectation, then, of the ultimate

undoing of the Devil and all his works, the old gentleman sat in his dim little parlour one grey morning in the year 1805, and as he listened to the salvoes of artillery booming in honour of the victory of Trafalgar, tapped his gold snuff-box with a certain pensive complacency. But there was another person in the room upon whom the sound of those cannons produced an entirely different effect, and who, at each fresh report, fidgeted and frowned and drummed so impatiently upon the table, that the Marquis was roused at last from his reverie, and looked up with an air of slightly offended surprise. This was no other than M. Charles, who had now developed into a tall, broad-shouldered, and handsome young man of three-and-twenty, and who, in the most reprehensible manner, had begun to hold opinions and form judgments of his own upon many matters; opinions and judgments which, if not speedily corrected, might lead him Heaven—or rather the Devil—only knew where.

'May I inquire, Charles,' said the Marquis, in his high, thin voice, 'what is disturbing you?'

'Sir,' says the young man, 'we have lost a battle.'

'Indeed? I was not aware of it. I imagined,

on the contrary, that the fleet of M. Buonaparte had received a crushing blow. But I do not trouble myself much about such matters at present; no doubt you are better informed than I. Where did this battle take place, Charles?'

'I was speaking of the battle of Trafalgar, sir, where, as you say, the French fleet has received a crushing blow. The army, I believe, continues to be everywhere victorious. Father,' continued the young man, in a more animated tone, 'let me go and fight for France! Republic or Empire, what signifies the government when it is the nation which is at war? When peace comes it will be time enough to think of politics. And what is to become of me if I am to remain here doing nothing all my life? Here I am neither English nor French, nor boy, nor man. I cannot fight for my king—let me at least draw my sword for my country!' And with this Charles plumped down on his knees, as people sometimes did in those days when they were strongly moved and wanted a thing very badly.

'Hum,' muttered the Marquis, stroking his chin. 'Your mother has to some extent prepared me for this outbreak. It is a point upon which we had better understand each other clearly and

finally. In the meantime you may as well rise; for your attitude will not affect the matter one way or the other, and your frame is too large to adapt itself readily to constrained postures. Will you now take a seat and be so good as to favour me with your attention for a few minutes? What you propose to do is to enter the service of a man who has usurped the throne of your sovereign—that is to say, to commit the crime of high treason, an offence punishable with death. To ask me to sanction such a course is to ask me to consent to the degradation of our name—which is simply absurd. I do not, however, lay any prohibition upon you. You are of an age to be capable of deciding upon your own course of action. If you can bring yourself to dishonour your father and be a traitor to your king, go. If you think you will not be disgracing your family by caracoling through Europe at the heels of an obscure and theatrical Corsican whom unparalleled events have raised for a time to the position of a successful Robespierre, by all means go. But do not, at any future time, expect me to intercede on your behalf; and remember that, in the event of your taking this step, I shall cease immediately and for ever to be in any way responsible for the result.'

This was not very encouraging, but it was more than Charles had expected.

Many years afterwards, when he himself was old and grey-headed, he described the scene to his children, and explained that the old Marquis was in the habit of expressing himself forcibly, and did not expect his words to be taken quite in a literal sense. 'I think he saw,' the narrator would say, 'that it was rather hard upon a young fellow, such as I was then, to be forced to sit idle with his hands in his lap, whilst others of his age were field-officers, and had been through two or three campaigns. Only he could not give an actual consent to my wearing the uniform of the Emperor, but preferred to let me do so upon my own responsibility. If I had known that I should see him but seldom, and my mother never again, after that day, I might have hesitated about leaving them; but I was young, and troubled myself very little about the future, thinking only of glory and the wars.'

To the wars M. Charles accordingly went; and thus we find him, about a year later, charging gallantly as a lieutenant of Hussars at the battle of Auerstadt, where he would very likely have distinguished himself more, had not a splinter of a

shell laid open his side early in the action, breaking three of his ribs, and nearly putting an end, then and there, to his military career.

Nor were the adverse fates contented with striking this devoted youth so sharp a corporeal blow, but must needs proceed to direct their arrows against the less easily curable region of the heart. For when poor Charles was sufficiently recovered of his wound to drag a feeble and emaciated body by slow stages in the direction of France, it so chanced that he made a halt at Coblenz, and there fell in with a lovely and fascinating Louise, daughter of the Duc and Duchesse de Joigny, a highly aristocratic couple, whom the Revolution had forced to fix their home for a time in that dreary town. Now the Duc, who was bored in his exile to the extent of almost dislocating his noble jaws by continual yawns, was glad enough to have the opportunity of showing some kindness to the son of his old friend, the Marquis de Mersac; and, at the same time, of satisfying his own curiosity as to the appearance, habits, and manners of the great man upon whom the eyes of the world were, at that time, eagerly fixed. Charles de Mersac, fresh from the battle-field, would, he thought, be the very man to give him the gossip-

ing information for which he longed; and it never occurred to him to suspect that the young soldier's ready acceptance of his proffered hospitality was prompted by any other feeling than a desire for intellectual conversation and refined companionship. To chat over the late campaign with one who had taken part in it, and to state in detail his own political views to a patient and courteous listener, was an amusement in which, *faute de mieux*, the old gentleman was willing to indulge for an unlimited period; but the idea that one who had so far forgotten himself as to wear the uniform of the usurper, should aspire to become his son-in-law was evidently preposterous—particularly when, as in the present case, the individual in question had but slender means and doubtful prospects.

The result of this way of looking at things on the part of the Duc de Joigny was that M. Charles left Coblenz rather suddenly, one bright summer morning in the year 1806, taking with him an exceedingly beautiful miniature slung round his neck by a blue ribbon, and that the fair Louise wept for twenty-four hours, more or less, after his departure.

All things considered, the next six years of

Charles de Mersac's life may be said to have been tolerably happy. At least, the element of excitement was not wanting in them. He returned to active service, and was wounded over and over again under Masséna and Soult in the Peninsula. Moreover he obtained the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and rose to the rank of Colonel. Danger was his delight, and neither pain, nor sickness, nor hunger, nor even defeat could sadden him; for he wore always next his heart the miniature he had carried away from Coblenz. He was naturally of a healthy, sanguine temperament, and doubted not that she who had sworn to remain faithful to him through good report and evil report would keep her vow as religiously as he had kept his. So that when he returned from Spain to Paris, invalided, in the year 1812, and weak from the effects of a long fever, the news that Louise de Joigny had been for some time the wife of the old Duc de Breuil, whose estates were almost as broad as his descent was long, was near being the death of him.

But though disappointment is a hard thing to bear, and treachery cuts deep, and the sudden wreck of the hopes and dreams of six years may

seem to overwhelm a man for a time, yet these are ills which have seldom been known to prove mortal. De Mersac did not die; but he set out with the Grand Army for Russia with a heavy heart, hoping for nothing better than that some stray bullet might relieve him of a world which he had now found to be altogether cruel, selfish, and deceitful.

That disastrous campaign proved to be his last. At the battle of Borodino he lost his sabre-arm, and there took leave of soldiering for good and all.

Brave as he was, and in spite of the philosophy with which he had already accustomed himself to look upon the vicissitudes of life, this last blow went very near to crushing de Mersac's spirit. He never loved to speak of the time that followed, when he lived with his father in the dull old house at Hampstead, which (his mother being now dead) had lost all attraction for him. Nevertheless he made the best of things, after his usual fashion, setting himself to learn how to use his left hand; and so well did he succeed in this, that, in the year 1814, when his father had departed to Paris to claim his estates, and become a high dignitary

at the court of Louis le Désiré, he was able to write with tolerable ease and rapidity, and needed no one to cut up his dinner for him.

It now became necessary that he should be presented to the King of France; and the prospect of this ceremony cost the old Marquis many a sleepless night, it being so very uncertain how that monarch would receive so erring a member of his faithful aristocracy.

The interview, however, passed off more smoothly than might have been expected.

'They tell me you are covered with wounds, sir,' said the King on that memorable occasion, 'and that you have gained little except a decoration. That is a poor reward for so many years of devoted service.'

'I fought for France, Sire,' replied de Mersac, who did not like Louis XVIII., and could never be brought to address him with a tithe of the respect he had shown to his mighty predecessor.

The old Marquis made a grimace when he heard this curt answer; but the King laughed good-naturedly.

'The whole nation did as you have done,' he said. 'But the nation has returned to its allegiance, and so have you. I regret very much that

circumstances have deprived the army of the services of so brave an officer; but, if you do not disdain civil employment, you may yet be able to serve your country, M. le Colonel.'

The upshot of this was that a diplomatic appointment was conferred upon the gallant Colonel; and in this branch of the public service he remained, doing his work creditably, though without much personal distinction, till the death of the King.

He was sitting over his breakfast at the small German Court to which he was accredited, one morning, shortly after the news of that deplored event had reached him, when his servant laid two letters on the table before him. He took one of them and broke the seal. It contained a brief intimation that his Majesty, King Charles X., had no further occasion for his services. 'Aha!' said de Mersac, 'I expected as much. M. le Comte d'Artois has little love for those who wear neither pigtails nor *soutanes*.' Then he opened the other letter, and over that he sighed more than once; for it announced the sudden death of the old Marquis; and though the father and son had never had much sympathy with one another, the latter was a man of stronger affections than the

generality of mankind; and to find oneself quite alone in the world, at a period of life when most men have a wife and children to take the place of the last generation, is enough to afford matter for sad reflection to the most philosophic mind.

And now the new Marquis de Mersac did a thing so grievous and scandalous that his name became a word of warning throughout the Faubourg St. Germain, and moans over his conduct were heard in the highest quarters. He actually sold his ancestral estates. It was considered no palliation of this crime that the culprit was driven thereto by what he chose to consider the necessity of paying the heavy debts bequeathed to him by his late father. The old Duc de Châteauvieux, to whom he ventured to put forward this excuse, had scarcely the patience to listen to him.

'Sir,' said he, 'there are certain lines of action which nothing can justify. As you are aware, I have never been one of those who condemned you and others, who were then young men, for wearing the uniform of Buonaparte. You obeyed then a natural and not ignoble impulse. But what you have done now will alienate from you the sympathies of every man who respects himself. One raises money, *parbleu !*—one borrows—one mort-

gages—one remains in debt—but sell one's estates!—never!'

Facilis descensus Averni! Having started with so prodigious a downward step, what could be expected but that the Marquis de Mersac should plunge still deeper into the abyss of disgrace? His friends were grieved rather than surprised when they heard that the misguided man had invested his remaining capital in trade, and had entered into partnership with a low-born West Indian merchant. After that it was a relief to learn that he had crossed the Atlantic to look after the interests of his business, and that Parisian society would no longer be shocked by the visible presence of the criminal.

Parisian society saw him no more; but those whose memory carries them back as far as the London seasons of 1838 and 1839 may recollect having met pretty frequently a stalwart, grey-haired, one-armed French gentleman, who bore the title of Marquis de Mersac, and who was understood to have amassed a moderate fortune in the West Indies.

This gentleman was very well received by the leaders of fashion in our metropolis, being, as was well known, the representative of one of the oldest

families in France, and having, besides, a comfortable fortune, agreeable manners, and an engaging presence. Among the men he speedily acquired popularity by his skill in horsemanship—a science which then, as now, was not considered in this country to be one of the strong points of his nation; while the ladies could not sufficiently praise his old-fashioned, courtly politeness, his readiness to oblige any one of them, old or young, handsome or plain, and a certain youthful sprightliness which yet clung to him in spite of his fifty-six years.

It was a surprise to his friends—perhaps a little disappointment to some of them—to hear that he was about to be married to a certain Miss Moreton, a plain-featured orphan, who already, at the age of six-and-twenty, had assumed something of the demeanour and habits of an old maid. It was thought that the handsome Marquis, old as he was, might have done better; but he never had reason himself to regret his choice. His wife—a good, meek, and somewhat characterless person, who adored him—behaved herself throughout her married life in an entirely exemplary manner. She embraced his religion, agreed in all his opinions—even before he uttered them—accom-

panied him without a murmur to the African colony, whither his longing for occupation of some kind led him ; and there, some time after such an event had ceased to appear probable, made him the father of a little girl, who eventually grew up into the stately young lady whom we saw just now gazing over the garden wall. Two years later an heir to the title of De Mersac saw the light ; and shortly after the accomplishment of this latter feat, Madame la Marquise, with a happy consciousness that, in an unobtrusive way, she had done what was required of her by God and man in this world, slipped gently out of it.

The widower was for some time very disconsolate. Like many other apparent nonentities, Madame la Marquise had been a helpful and valuable creature in her own restricted sphere; and her husband found that his loss had cast upon him many new responsibilities, not the least of which was the care and education of a couple of small children—a task for which he felt himself to be in no way qualified. Help was, however, in store for him in the carrying out of this last duty. Early in the days of his mourning a very old friend of his appeared unexpectedly upon the scene. A series of trivial circumstances—a slight attack of

bronchitis in the first place, a quarrel with her doctor at Nice in the second, and a general weariness of familiar localities in the third—induced the Duchesse de Breuil to visit Algiers; and, hearing that M. de Mersac had taken up his abode in the neighbourhood of the town, she hastened to renew her acquaintance with him, after an interruption of over forty years.

The former lovers met again, as one may imagine, with a shock of surprise, half pleasant, half painful, with a stirring of many old memories, and a faint throbbing of wounds long since healed over by merciful Time. Between the handsome, wasp-waisted young hussar of Jena and the bronzed, grey-headed farmer of El-Biar—between the lovely, innocent Louise de Joigny and the Duchesse de Breuil, a *grande dame* who had played no inconsiderable part in the political and social history of her country till she had been shouldered aside to make room for the satellites of a new *régime*—between 1806 and 1850, what a difference! They were, to all intents and purposes, strangers to one another, and yet bound together by a tie which both, in the sunset of their lives, were eager to acknowledge. The ghost of their dead youth rose up between them and joined

their trembling old hands. The Marquis showed his old flame the miniature which had accompanied him through all his campaigns and wanderings; and the old lady sighed over it, and cried a little. This work of art is now in the possession of the present Marquis; and at the back of it, under the velvet of the frame, still remains a scrap of paper, on which is written, in faded ink, '*Toujours fidèle*: *Coblence*, 1806,' . . . an inscription of which the irony may have often struck its original owner.

The Duchess, homeless, childless, and nearly friendless—for she did not happen to be upon good terms with the inheritor of her husband's title and estates, and had no near relation of her own family—was, without much difficulty, persuaded to take the lease of a villa adjoining that which was now known as the Campagne de Mersac. She said it would be useful to her as a winter residence; but by degrees her absences became less and less frequent, and ever of shorter duration, till at last it was understood that she considered her home to be in Algeria. She took a great interest in the children of her old admirer, and charged herself with such elements of their bringing-up as generally fall to a mother's lot. Léon

was her favourite; as was perhaps natural, seeing that the Marquis displayed a marked partiality for the little Jeanne.

And so the years slipped by, and the Duchesse de Breuil became, in some sense, a member of the de Mersac household. Léon declares that his father and the Duchess used to flirt outrageously, and that he never could understand why they did not marry; but Léon is a flippant young man, and often says foolish things. It was Louise de Joigny, and not the Duchesse de Breuil, with whom the old Marquis had been in love; and though he had a very sincere admiration and respect for the latter lady, it may be doubted whether, in his heart of hearts, he ever connected her very closely with the former. The friendship of the two old people was probably not the less strong for the romantic memories which a word or a hint from either of them could summon up into the thoughts of the other, as children by holding a shell to their ear catch echoes of its native waves; but the romance itself had vanished long since beyond recalling, and was no more a reality now than the sea in the shell. He, being obliged to be often away from home by the exigencies of his farming operations and of his latest hobby, the breeding

of horses, thanked Heaven that he could leave his children in the care of a lady, while she was not less grateful for the new interests which preserved her old age from utter loneliness. But for this reciprocity of benefit, it is probable that the *fiancés* of 1806 would not have renewed their intimacy.

The Marquis survived his wife about a dozen years. A malarious fever, contracted at his stud-farm in the Metidja plain, proved fatal to him in the long run, chiefly owing to neglect. He had an iron constitution, and from his youth up had been accustomed to treat all maladies, as the Irishman treated the measles, 'with contempt;' but at eighty years of age it does not take much to kill a man, and so the Marquis failed to rally from his third bout of the fever.

His death left the immediate future of his children in some uncertainty; for though Fanchette, the old nurse, was an excellent and devoted creature, it would scarcely have been advisable that they should be left under her sole care; and the only guardian appointed for them was M. de Fontvieille, an old widower, who spent his time between Algiers and Paris, and had no establishment of his own. To the immense relief of this old gentleman, who had been greatly perturbed

by the responsibility thus cast upon him, the Duchesse de Breuil came forward with a solution of the difficulty, proposing to take up her abode with the children of her old friend, and to treat them in every respect as her own, so long as her life should be spared. This seemed a highly satisfactory arrangement; but, before finally acceding to it, M. de Fontvieille thought it right to put himself in communication with the few near relations of the orphans—some cousins, resident in Auvergne, and a Mrs. Ashley, a younger sister of the late Marquise. The hearty and unreserved approval of the scheme which reached him, by return of post, from both these quarters, made him chuckle sardonically; for he was a somewhat cynical old fellow, and enjoyed nothing more than some fresh proof of the selfishness and insincerity of his fellow-creatures. He took up his hat, his snuff-box, and the two letters, and presented himself in the drawing-room of his friend the Duchess.

'Madame,' said he, bending over her hand in his old-fashioned way, 'you are free to carry out your benevolent intentions: the family will not oppose itself to you. They had been eager to welcome their young relations, but they think

themselves bound to consult the dear children's wishes rather than their own.'

'No one cares to add two strangers to his family,' observed the Duchess, more charitably; 'to most people such a necessity would be a misfortune; to me, as it happens, it is a blessing.'

So she packed up her belongings, and moved from her villa to the Campagne de Mersac, where she was received with unfeigned joy. The young people were fond of her, and infinitely preferred remaining in the old home, under her tutelage, to going among strangers; and she, on her side, loved them, and did her duty by them, according to her lights.

With Jeanne she was not able to feel much sympathy. The girl's inordinate grief at her father's death—a grief which showed itself in no violent form, but only by pallor, listlessness, heavy eyes, and a morbid shrinking from all amusements—puzzled her at first, and then irritated her. To show feeling in such a case, the Duchess admitted, was only proper and becoming; but then feeling should be manifested in recognised ways, otherwise one did not know how to deal with it, and it became an absolute nuisance. It was not natural that a girl of fifteen should mope and mourn for

a twelvemonth and more because things had taken their natural course, and her father had gone to his long home after reaching the extreme limit of life accorded to man by the Psalmist. Moreover, Jeanne was so proud, so reserved, so perfectly imperturbable, that the Duchess, who was secretly a little afraid of her, was conscious of a disinclination, which strengthened as the years went on, to tell her of her faults; and this, as everyone must allow, is a sad obstacle in the way of any real cordiality of intercourse.

So, although the Duchess and Jeanne were, upon the whole, very good friends, by far the larger share of the former lady's affections was given to Léon, who certainly possessed what most people would consider a more loveable character than that of his sister. The education of the young Marquis was conducted entirely at home—a system not uncommon in France, and one perhaps less disadvantageous to a boy in that country than in this. The Curé of El-Biar grounded him in his own language and in Latin, and continued to superintend his daily lessons till he had reached an age which was considered sufficiently advanced to warrant the engagement of a tutor for him; Madame la Duchesse (who had every reason to

consider herself eminently qualified for the task) instructed him in manners and deportment; M. de Fontvieille (with no less confidence in his capacity) imparted to him a knowledge of men and things, derived from many years' philosophical study of an infinitesimal section of humanity; and Pierre Cauvin, a shrewd old Auvergnat, who had been his father's factotum ever since the first purchase of the Algerian property, taught him agriculture and the art of breaking horses. And all these good people adored and spoiled him in the most inexcusable manner.

The consequence of their co-operation was much what might have been anticipated—or perhaps it ought rather to be said that it was better than might have been anticipated. At the time our story opens Léon was a singularly handsome young fellow of one-and-twenty, tall, broad-shouldered, sunburnt, a very fair shot, a good dancer, and a really excellent rider. He was tolerably well read, and quick at catching up any scraps of information that might come in his way. His manner, always that of the old school, had, towards strangers, a considerable tinge of frigidity and *hauteur*; but in the family circle he was given to be talkative, and expressed his views upon all

matters with perfect freedom. He placed, indeed, a somewhat exaggerated estimate upon the value of his own opinions; as was not unnatural, considering the nature of his training. That he did not grow up an insufferable young prig was probably owing partly to the bracing effects of out-door life and the constant contact with unmanageable agricultural difficulties, partly to a certain hereditary simplicity of disposition, and finally to the influence of his sister Jeanne, the only person in the world of whom he felt any awe, and who loved him far too well to flatter him. Taking him altogether, he bade fair to become no unworthy representative of a fine old Legitimist family; and, feeling this, the Duchess and M. de Fontvieille looked upon the result of their labours and were content.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH JEANNE HAS A DISAPPOINTMENT.

MADEMOISELLE DE MERSAC, whose character exhibited a good many traits of a kind more or less puzzling to her friends, was in nothing more incomprehensible to them than in her prolonged and voluntary spinsterhood. A young lady of the quasi-mature age of three-and-twenty, beautiful, well-dowered, of excellent family, and still unmarried, is no ordinary phenomenon in French society; but then Mademoiselle de Mersac was not an ordinary person, nor were her circumstances ordinary circumstances. Had she occupied a position analogous to that of her neighbours, her matrimonial affairs would, of course, have been arranged for her long since by provident parents; but Fate had decreed that she should make her *début* in society as an orphan, and, further, that she should do so in the exceptional character of absolute mistress of her own destinies. For the

late Marquis de Mersac, influenced by his English education, his English wife, and also perhaps by certain melancholy experiences of his own, had harboured, and frequently expressed, an intention that his daughter should choose her husband for herself *à la mode anglaise.* Whether, after his death, his desires would have been respected by the Duchesse de Breuil (who, for her part, thought them eminently injudicious), had that lady possessed the power of opposing them, is at least open to doubt; but, happily or unhappily for Jeanne, she had no such power. Mademoiselle de Mersac's marriage portion was, by her father's will, held in trust for her till the day of her wedding or the completion of her thirtieth year, at either of which dates it became her absolute property; and thus, as the Duchess sometimes complained bitterly to her intimate friends, there was nothing to prevent the young lady from marrying a negro if she felt so disposed. By what possible means any further restriction could have been laid upon her young *protégée* the Duchess did not stop to inquire; but it was a sad reflection to her that the only weapon at her disposal for coercing Jeanne into a suitable alliance was that of moral force, and a still sadder that this weapon had hitherto proved a wholly

ineffectual one. She did what she could. She brought forward suitor after suitor of the most unexceptionable sort; but Jeanne would have nothing to say to any of them, and showed herself completely impervious to persuasion, scolding, or tears.

'You will kill me with your wicked obstinacy!' the poor old Duchess would cry after each of her periodical failures; and then Jeanne would kiss her, wipe away her tears and comfort her, as a mother comforts a fractious child. But the Duchess, of course, did not die of vexation, and, equally of course, Jeanne did not give way.

Algerian society, busying itself about its neighbours' concerns with no less gusto than all other human communities, great and small, had several explanations of Mademoiselle de Mersac's conduct to offer. Some said she had formed an unfortunate attachment; others had discovered that the one passion of her nature was an insatiable ambition, and that she aspired to some more splendid alliance than could be looked for in a colony; while the more charitable declared that she had vowed to sacrifice her life to taking care of the interests and well-being of her brother, to whom her devotion was notorious, and whose habits, in-

deed, had of late shown some dawning symptoms of needing judicious supervision. Nobody, of course, accepted the young lady's own assertion that she had not yet met a man whom she cared to contemplate as a husband, because nobody ever does accept the most natural and probable solution of an enigma. It happened, however, to be true.

At the same time, there was some foundation for the statement that her brother's happiness, rather than her own, was the chief aim and object of Jeanne's existence. She had naturally strong affections, and loved her species as well as most of us and a good deal better than some; but she had not the power of interesting, or seeming to interest, herself in the trivial concerns of people of whom she knew nothing; her manner was often cold, and when she felt bored, she looked bored. She was not, therefore, by any means universally popular; nor, to tell the truth, did she greatly covet popularity. Intimate friends she had none, and, never having had any, did not regret their absence. All the more did she long for the love of those whom she herself loved; and of this very select few, Léon was, after her father's death, by far the most important person. From his baby-

hood the boy had been her especial charge, and, though she was by so little his senior, her influence and authority over him were greater than those of many a mother over her son. By instinct probably as much as by judgment she managed to maintain that influence up to a time at which the generality of young men have little respect for their sisters' opinions. At the age of one-and-twenty Léon had not abandoned the habit of consulting Jeanne in every difficulty; and if he had any secrets from her, they were as yet few. In matters connected with farming he would as soon have thought of applying for advice to one of his Arab grooms as to either of the excellent old people who stood towards him, in some sort, in the relation of parents; but he seldom sold a horse, or bought a strip of land, or concluded a bargain of any kind, without having first taken his sister's opinion; and he was not far wrong, for Jeanne had been at infinite pains to inform herself upon all subjects affecting her brother's welfare, and was not to be taken in as to the value of horse or land by any sharp customer, whether Christian or heathen.

Nor, while looking after Léon's pecuniary interests, was Jeanne insensible to the advisability

of his seeing something more of men and the world than he could do in Algeria. She had several battles to fight on this point with M. de Fontvieille, who had seen the world in his time, and thought that young men were best kept out of it; and with the Duchess, who considered that the world had virtually come to an end with the deposition of Charles X., or at least that it was passing through a period of interregnum during which people of quality could but shrug their shoulders and ignore it. She carried her point, however, as quiet, persistent folks commonly do; and thus the young Marquis was permitted from time to time to make journeys to Paris, upon one pretext or another; and derived therefrom amusement, experience, and possibly some elements of ultimate profit.

The periods of his absence were always dreary ones for Jeanne; and on the particular occasion on which we have to make her acquaintance, she was more than ordinarily anxious for the wanderer's return, both because he had been longer away than usual, and because his trip had, this time, extended as far as England, whither he had gone with the double object of purchasing certain articles of farm machinery and of introducing

himself to the surviving members of his mother's family. Mademoiselle de Mersac, whose imperturbability was mistaken by most of her friends for indifference, possessed (under proper control) a very fair share of feminine inquisitiveness, and she thought she would enjoy her breakfast more if she put off eating it till she was able to combine the necessary support of the flesh with gratification of some legitimate curiosity as to the appearance and manners of these unknown Engish cousins.

She paced slowly up and down the gravel paths, pausing every now and again to bend her beautiful face over a freshly-opened rose or to pull up a weed from the well-kept border. She was not in a mood for occupation, and preferred remaining out of doors, though the breeze had died away and the sun was beating down with a force which would have driven most people to seek for shade. But Jeanne, unlike the generality of Southerners, had no fear of the sun's rays. She seated herself presently upon a low bench, and contemplated with dreamy satisfaction the broad, glittering stretch of sea which no longer separat d her from her brother.

The air was hushed and drowsy; there was

not a breath of wind to set the bananas and bamboos whispering; the fountain had ceased to play (for water is a precious commodity in Algeria, and must not be too unsparingly made use of); the house, behind whose closely-shut green *persiennes* Madame la Duchesse was even now making her toilette with the assistance of her maid, was silent as the grave. Only, from the distant stables, came the sound of an occasional stamp or a half-smothered hinny. The world was taking its noon-day siesta; and it almost seemed to Jeanne as if old Time himself had yielded to the slumberous influence, and was indulging himself with a short nap, so slowly did the minutes move. At length, after having consulted her watch half-a-dozen times, and held it to her ear to ascertain that it had not stopped, she made a brief calculation.

'Ten minutes to get on shore—a quarter of an hour at the Custom-house—half an hour to canter up the hill—and, say, another ten minutes to talk to any friends he may meet in the town—that makes an hour and five minutes,' she murmured. 'According to that, he ought to be here almost immediately.'

And, sure enough, before the words were well past her lips, there came from the distance a sound

which made her start to her feet—the steady trot, trot of a couple of horses upon the high road. More faintly for a moment or two, then loud and clear again came the rhythmic beat of the hoofs, drawing rapidly nearer and nearer till they halted at length within a few yards of the anxious listener's ear. The creaking gates swung open; there was a stamping and crushing of the gravel; and Jeanne, stepping out from behind the cypresses which bordered the avenue, with a glad smile of welcome illumining her face, met—a well-mounted Arab groom conducting a led horse.

The man pulled up at once, threw his leg over his horse's head, slid to the ground, thrust his hand into one of the pockets of his baggy breeches, and, after fumbling for a time in apparently unfathomable depths, captured a scrap of paper which, with a low bow, he held out to his young mistress. Jeanne took it, and read the following words, hastily scrawled in pencil: 'Arrived safe and sound. Saint-Luc has persuaded me to breakfast with him at the Hôtel d'Orient. Shall be with you before dinner-time. I embrace you a thousand times.—LÉON. If you were inclined to be very amiable you might just walk round to the yard, and see that Hamid lets the

grey cool before taking off his saddle. You know what the rascal is; and I cannot afford to have another horse marked for life by a sore back.'

Jeanne had at all times an almost perfect command of feature. With a heart aching with disappointment and mortification, and a sense of injury somewhat greater perhaps than her brother's thoughtless offence merited, she was nevertheless, to all outward seeming, entirely unmoved. She folded up the scrap of paper deliberately, dismissed the untrustworthy Hamid with a smile and a nod, and presently, in pursuance of the directions she had received, followed him to the stable-yard. A colony of dogs, large and small, came out to meet her, and cringed at her feet, or leapt up upon her, according to their several ages and characters; a jackal, chained to his kennel, flew wildly backwards and forwards, at the utmost limit of his tether, till he choked and nearly made himself sick; a wild boar, also chained, bounced out from a barrel, in which he had been concealed, and stood blinking his angry little red eyes, and snorting a welcome; and a peacock, after sidling doubtfully round the outskirts of the canine escort and establishing his authority by one or two savage pecks at a small woolly pup, swept up to

her side with the conscious dignity of an assured favourite. She had a caress for each and all of them; it was never Jeanne's way to vent her vexation upon her surroundings. She scratched the boar's back with the tip of her parasol, reasoned with the impetuous jackal, played with the dogs, and fed the peacock just as usual; and it was not until she had seen the grey horse led away into his stable that she turned and walked slowly towards the house. A huge white Pyrenean dog, the only one of the pets who had the privilege of crossing the threshold, stalked solemnly after her.

Meeting her old nurse in the hall, she begged her to order breakfast, mentioning that M. Léon had arrived safely, but that he would not be home before dinner-time. 'Did I not tell you so?' cried Fanchette triumphantly. But Jeanne made no reply. What Fanchette's prediction might have been did not seem to her a matter of much importance; the lamentable fact was that her brother had preferred the company of a chance acquaintance to her own; and she was foolish enough to take this slight so much to heart that it was only with difficulty that she managed to swallow a small portion of the repast which was shortly set before her.

This task accomplished, she rose from the table and betook herself to the drawing-room followed by Turco, the hound before mentioned.

The *salon* of the Campagne de Mersac was the pride of its owners and the envy of its neighbours. It was in the older portion of the building, of which, indeed, it occupied the entire length; and, after the usual Moorish plan, was oblong in shape and had a deep recess, or *marabout*, jutting out on either side. One of these, which had several narrow, pointed windows commanding a wide view of the sea, was partly filled by a mass of ferns and flowering-plants, while that facing it had been fitted up as a small library, and displayed well-bound editions of Racine, Corneille, Montesquieu, Fénélon, and other unexceptionable writers; for the Duchesse de Breuil did not approve of indiscriminate reading for young people, and kept such unprofitable modern works as she required for her own amusement carefully under lock and key upstairs. The room was rather dark owing to the smallness of the windows and the great thickness of the walls—for here, as always, the design of the old Moorish builders had been to exclude sunshine and heat—but it was not too dark; only pleasantly dim, cool, and silent, and the

delicate tracery of the white plaster arabesques on the walls showed to greater advantage in the semi-obscurity than it would have done in a stronger light. The glazed blue and white tiles of the floor had not been altogether hidden from view by a carpet, as is the case in some Algerian houses; but some handsome Turkey rugs had been placed here and there, and there were two fine lion-skins, trophies of the success of the old Marquis's gun in the days of his early life in the African colony. The furniture, though not very fresh or modern in type, was solid and comfortable; nor was there any lack of luxurious sofas and arm-chairs.

Beside the fireplace, where a wood fire was blazing cheerfully, stood a deep, low *fauteuil*, which Jeanne now proceeded to prepare for the only person who was ever permitted to occupy it. She arranged the cushions, dragged up a footstool and a small table, on which last she placed a vase full of fresh roses, and then, stationing herself in the *marabout*, stood, with her hands behind her back, gazing out rather sadly on the sunny prospect till the rustle of a silk dress behind her made her turn round.

A little, bent, withered old lady, beautifully

dressed, came in, leaning on a stick, and glanced sharply from side to side. Then she walked straight up to Turco, who was lying outstretched in the middle of the room flapping his tail sleepily in token of welcome, and prodded him in the ribs.

'That dog has sworn to bring about my death,' said she, shaking her stick at the delinquent. 'He knows very well that a fall would be fatal at my age, and that I cannot see two inches before my nose, when I come into this dark room from outside; and so he deliberately places himself in my path, hoping that I shall trip over him, come down, and break every bone in my body. Fortunately, Nature has made him white; if he had been a brown or a black monster, I should have been in the Kingdom of Heaven months ago.'

Jeanne advanced and kissed the old lady's hand, after the graceful old fashion to which she had been trained, and led her to her armchair.

The Duchess sank down among the cushions, arranged her dress so that it fell in graceful folds about her, placed her tiny feet upon the footstool, and then, raising her eyebrows interrogatively—

'And Léon?' said she.

'He will not be home before dinner-time,'

answered Jeanne. 'Hamid brought me a line from him to say that he had arrived, but that he was stopping to breakfast in the town.'

'To breakfast in the town!' echoed the old lady sharply; 'why should he do that? It is not kind—it is a want of respect to me. Oh, my dear, I understand what you mean by your calm face! To you a few hours more or less may seem a small matter; but at my age every moment of time has its value; and besides that, I don't like to think that my boy cares so little about seeing us again that he is ready to turn aside, as soon as he lands, to breakfast with the first one he meets. Who is his friend?'

'M. de Saint-Luc, I believe.'

The Duchess's features relaxed perceptibly. 'Well, well,' she said, 'he might have remembered that we should be longing to embrace him; but young men will be thoughtless; and at least I am glad that he chooses his friends well. That M. de Saint-Luc is charming—quite charming!'

There is a certain method of assertion, as everybody knows, which seems to court denial; and there is a certain kind of silence which is infinitely more aggravating than the flattest contradiction. The Duchess found her encomium on M. de Saint-

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Luc met with such imperturbable and emphatic speechlessness on the part of Jeanne that she could not help adding, with a considerable spice of irritability—

'You do not like M. de Saint-Luc. But this is of course. If a man be clever, gentlemanly, agreeable, superior to the ordinary run—if he please me, in short—that is sufficient. You ask no better reason for honouring him with your detestation.'

Jeanne smiled slightly, and put a fresh log upon the fire.

'After all,' resumed the Duchess, 'what can you have to say against M. de Saint-Luc?'

'I have said nothing against him, madame,' replied Jeanne, who, it must be allowed, was far more exasperating at times than she had any knowledge or intention of being.

'No; but you look as if you could say a great deal if you chose, and that is much worse. And it is ridiculous, too, because it is impossible that you can know anything to his disadvantage.'

The latter part of this remark was made in so interrogative a tone that Jeanne could scarcely avoid making some reply to it. So she said in

her slow, deliberate way, 'I do not think him a good friend for Léon.'

The Duchess emitted a short, high laugh. 'In that case of course there is nothing more to be said. Your knowledge of the world is so great, your experience is naturally so much larger than mine, you are so well acquainted with the private lives of young men, that it only remains for us to warn Léon against having anything further to do with M. de Saint-Luc.'

Speeches of this kind seldom annoyed Jeanne. She had too little *amour propre* to be stung by such tiny shafts of sarcasm.

'I have already done that,' she remarked quietly.

'Really! and in spite of that it seems that Léon persists in choosing his own friends for himself. Might one venture to inquire what M. de Saint-Luc has done to incur your dislike?'

'I neither like nor dislike him,' answered Jeanne, with a slight disdainful gesture; 'I care nothing about him. But I do not think his company is likely to do Léon any good. He is a gambler; he has dissipated his fortune by betting and card-playing in Paris.'

This happened to be true, and the Duchess

knew it. But she had her own reasons for wishing to represent M. de Saint-Luc in a favourable light.

'Bah! follies of youth—what would you have?' she returned, shrugging her shoulders. 'The best of men are often a little wild at starting. Look at our good M. de Fontvieille. I recollect him as one of the most notorious *viveurs* of his day. M. de Saint-Luc will settle down, and become as good a husband and father as a thousand others.'

'Very possibly,' said Jeanne. 'I was not thinking of M. de Saint-Luc's future, but of his influence upon Léon, whom you would hardly like to see following his example.'

'Léon is different,' answered the Duchess decisively. 'Léon is a man of principles: he will not be easily lead astray.'

And this assertion Jeanne did not see fit to contradict.

'But I think,' resumed the Duchess, recurring, after a pause, to her original grievance, 'I think Léon should have paid me the compliment of coming here before visiting other friends: age is not respected now as it was in my time. He might have remembered, too, that this is my

reception-day, and that it would be highly inconvenient if he should present himself when the room is full of people. If he should arrive early, Jeanne, you must go out and keep him away till I am alone; I cannot let myself be agitated in the presence of strangers. I have no longer the strength that I once had; and I begin to dread this weekly crowd of visitors. It is only for your sake, my child, that I continue to receive at all. Were I living alone, I should shut myself up with my books and my memories till the time came for me to leave this weary world.'

CHAPTER III.

MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS.

It was the Duchess's custom to speak plaintively of the necessity she felt herself to be under of mixing in Algerian society. 'A crowd of colonists, of small officials, of officers *en retraite* and their wives—judge whether I find the conversation of these people amusing!' she would sigh sometimes to her intimates. But in truth she greatly enjoyed patronising the good folks of whom she spoke so slightingly, and was happier on Monday (which was her reception-day) than on any other day of the seven. Nor was she wholly dependent for companionship upon the three above-mentioned classes. A few Legitimist families—offshoots, more or less poverty-stricken, of the great houses whose names they bore—had established themselves in the neighbourhood of Algiers; and of their support in the fatiguing task of entertaining her inferiors the Duchess was as sure as she was

of their affection and reverence. Surrounded by these, the old lady held her little weekly court, and dispensed smiles and frowns with all the judicious tact of a reigning sovereign. There had been a time when the favourable notice of the Duchesse de Breuil was not only a passport into the highest circles of the Parisian world, but often carried with it more substantial advantages; but those days were gone and well-nigh forgotten, like the ministers, the great ladies, the office-seekers, and the toadies who had played their little parts under Charles X., and had long since been replaced by other sets of actors who knew them not nor cared for them. Now, in her old age, it pleased the Duchess to think that some remnant of power still clung to her, were it only that of leading the most exclusive set in a colony.

If some of the younger and more fashionable Algerian ladies laughed at her a little behind her back, we may be sure that they controlled their features and were mighty respectful in her presence; for, after all, a duchess of the old nobility is a duchess, be she never so antiquated and overlooked; and as Madame de Breuil's door was not by any means open to all comers, such of the officials of the Second Empire as she chose to re-

ceive seldom missed an opportunity of paying their respects to her, and looked upon her recognition of them as in some sort a brevet of rank.

Monday afternoons, therefore, usually saw a sufficiency of equipages and pedestrians toiling up the hill to El-Biar, and the particular Monday afternoon with which we are concerned was no exception to the general rule. Shortly before four o'clock the visitors began to arrive, and soon the room was nearly filled by a somewhat heterogeneous assemblage. There were stern Legitimist dames and sleek Imperial functionaries; a turbaned Moor and a dignitary of the Church; a Chasseur d'Afrique or two, resplendent in blue and silver and scarlet; and a sprinkling of foreigners domiciled temporarily in Algiers by the doctor's orders. A little posse of English ladies had walked up from the town to pay their respects, and displayed their stout walking-boots and short dresses in blissful unconsciousness that by presenting themselves in such a costume they were committing a solecism in good manners which nothing but a profound conviction of the utter barbarity of their nation could have induced the Duchess to pardon. These good people were

soon passed on to Jeanne, who liked the English and spoke our language easily; the Duchess preferred that the place of honour beside her chair should be occupied by some more entertaining person. She enjoyed gossip, though she affected to despise it, and seldom failed to glean a large fund of amusement from her reception day. She was probably the only person in the room who did; for visits of ceremony, which are dismal affairs enough, heaven knows, in this country, are ten times worse in France; and the Duchess chose that her receptions should maintain a character of the strictest formality.

The ladies, who were grouped in the vicinity of their hostess, seldom spoke unless she addressed them; their husbands, who sat in a band at a short distance off, accurately dressed in frock-coats and varnished boots, smoothed their chimney-pot hats and conversed together in an undertone; there was no laughter; no one was, or was intended to be, quite at his ease.

It was late in the afternoon, and a good many of the Duchess's friends had already effected their escape, when a lady was announced, at the sound of whose name all the matrons present assumed an aspect of extreme severity, while the Duchess her-

self became very rigid about the backbone as she rose slowly to receive her visitor.

'How do you do, Madame de Trémonville?' said she, extending a little, lifeless hand.

The new-comer, a young and very pretty woman, dressed in the extreme of the fashion, but in perfect taste, took the stiff five fingers thus proffered to her between both her own primrose-kidded palms, and pressed them affectionately.

'Charmed to see you looking so well, dear madame,' she murmured, in a soft, caressing voice. 'You grow younger—positively younger—every year.'

'I am an old woman,' answered the Duchess curtly; 'but my health is tolerably good, thank God! For the rest, I did not ruin my constitution when I was young, like some people.'

'Like me, *n'est-ce pas?* Alas! dear madame, what would you? There are some natures which require excitement, and there are others which are contented with mere existence. As for me, I must be amused. If I shorten my life, *ma foi!* so much the better: I could never endure to grow old and ugly. Ah, Madame de Vaublanc, a thousand pardons! I did not see you. Pray do not think of giving up your chair to me—well, if you

insist, I will take your place beside our dear Duchess for a few minutes. She is a little deaf, you know.'

And Madame de Trémonville sank into the armchair vacated by the grim old lady to whom she had addressed herself.

Now, as the Duchess was not in the least deaf, as the chair at her side was never taken, even by her most intimate friends, except by invitation, and as its late occupant had never for a moment entertained any notion of ceding it, it will be perceived that Madame de Trémonville was a lady of considerable assurance and *aplomb*. She sank, not ungracefully, into the vacant place, and bent forward towards the Duchess in such a manner as almost to turn her back upon the rest of the company.

'And when,' she asked, after having monopolised the attention of her hostess during a good five minutes, to the immense disgust of the old ladies, who sat grimly and silently surveying her, 'and when may we hope for the return of our little Marquis?'

'It is of my godson that you speak, madame? We expect him to-day,' answered the Duchess in her iciest tone.

'*À la bonne heure!* He will bring us news from Paris—ah! just heaven, how I wish I were back there!—yes; he will have news to tell us; and he is very *naïf* and amusing, your little Marquis. He used to honour my poor house with his company tolerably often before he went away. You know that I have the pretension to make him into a good Buonapartist.'

At the calm effrontery of this speech a thrill of horror pervaded the entire room, starting with Madame de Vaublanc, and ending with little M. Moineau, who was sitting alone near the door rubbing his nose with his gold-headed cane, and who shuddered from head to foot when the words, which were spoken rather loudly, as if in sheer bravado, reached his ear. He was himself a staunch adherent of the established government—by whose favour, indeed, he held the small appointment to which he was indebted for his daily bread—but he would no more have dared to allude to his political opinions in the presence of Madame la Duchesse than to mention the Comte de Chambord before his own chief.

The Duchess, however, showed no sign of anger, but merely replied with a slight, disdainful

smile : 'I fear you have imposed upon yourself a difficult task, madame.'

In truth the old lady did not think her antagonist worth powder and shot, and honestly believed that Madame de Trémonville belonged to a class so infinitely beneath her own as to preclude even the possibility of an encounter between them. The woman was very impertinent, certainly, but so are the *gamins* in the streets ; there is a kind of impertinence which cannot rise to the level of an affront.

But Madame de Vaublanc probably took a less lofty view of her station, for she hastened to accept the challenge which the Duchess had ignored.

'It seems to me, madame,' said she, in her thin, acid voice, that you might well leave M. le Marquis in peace. If all that I hear is true, your house is frequented from morning to night and from night to morning by every officer in Algiers ; one young man more or less can scarcely signify to you.'

'Oh, madame, you flatter me!' answered Madame de Trémonville, turning round, with a pleasant smile, to face her assailant. 'It is true

that some of these gentlemen are kind enough to come, from time to time, and try to preserve me from dying of *ennui* in this horrible place; but every officer in Algiers—oh, no! my little villa has neither accommodation nor attractions enough for so large a society. Your friends have exaggerated to you, dear Madame de Vaublanc. Besides, you conceive that one must have a little variety. I have the greatest possible admiration for our brave army, but I do not desire to live in a world inhabited only by soldiers. M. de Mersac, who, I assure you, honours me by his visits entirely of his own free will, amuses me sometimes, and you would not be so cruel as to wish to deprive me of any amusement I can get in this deplorable country.'

'If you do not like Algiers, why do you stay here, madame?' cried Madame de Vaublanc. 'M. de Trémonville, at least, has some reasons, I suppose, for finding it advisable to remain where he is.'

'If so, he has not communicated them to me,' returned Madame de Trémonville, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. 'As for the miserable little salary which he receives from his appointment here, you will easily believe that that can

scarcely influence him. He accepted it, in the first instance, out of regard for my health, and he has continued to hold it—heaven knows why! I daresay we shall go away soon. In the meantime one endeavours to be as cheerful as one can. Why do you never join our little *réunions*, dear madame? Come without ceremony any Thursday evening; we shall be enchanted to see you; you will be the life of our party.'

At this audacious proposition Madame de Vaublanc nearly choked with anger. Madame de Trémonville was young, pretty, and had not the best of reputations. Shocking stories were told of her extravagance, of her card parties, of her flirtations. (There is no French word for flirtation, and Madame de Vaublanc qualified the lady's conduct by a less ambiguous term.) She had an indomitable courage, a perfect command of herself, and a complexion as beautiful as the best rouge and *blanc-de-perles* could make it; whereas the poor old Vaublanc was ugly, wrinkled, irreproachable, and cross, and turned of a dusky-red colour when she was angered. The combat was an unequal one, and the elder lady hastened to retire from it.

'Allow *me*, at least, to choose my own friends,

madame,' she muttered, drumming with her foot on the floor.

'*Plaît-il?*' murmured Madame de Trémonville softly, turning open eyes of innocent wonder upon the silent company.

The ungrateful old Duchess laughed, and several of the gentlemen put their hands over their mouths and stroked their moustaches reflectively.

Nobody was very fond of Madame de Vaublanc, who, like many other virtuous people, was apt to be a little hard upon the pleasant vices of her neighbours; and some of those who had suffered from her strictures upon their conduct were not ill-pleased to see her thus publicly discomfited, although her assailant was an Imperialist, a woman of no family, and one who was only admitted upon sufferance into their coterie. Even so, when certain statesmen are attacked in Parliament, and wince under the lash, those who sit behind them may sometimes watch with perfect equanimity the tribulation of their leaders, and even quietly chuckle over the same. An occasional touch of the rod is wholesome discipline for an over-proud spirit.

Madame de Trémonville knew better than to

linger too long upon the scene of her small victory. In a very few minutes she got up, took a cordial farewell of the Duchess, and swept gracefully down the room, bowing as she went to several of the company, who had risen to let her pass. Jeanne held the door open for her.

'Adieu, mademoiselle,' she said, with a fascinating smile; '*bien des choses à monsieur votre frère.*'

Whereat Jeanne bowed gravely, but vouchsafed no reply.

A torrent of shrill ejaculations followed the audacious lady's exit. 'What a woman!'—'What insolence!'—'What an impossible costume! And did you remark that she was rouged up to her eyes?'—'Decidedly one must renounce the idea of receiving these people, if they know so little how to conduct themselves.'—'To say that M. le Marquis was in the habit of visiting her—has one ever heard such impertinence! Naturally there could be no truth in what she said.'—'Oh, madame, one does not give oneself the trouble to contradict falsehoods so transparent!'—'Ah, dear Madame de Vaublanc, you did well to put her back in her proper place!'

In the midst of this indignant chorus Fan-

chette's withered face was thrust through the half-open door. She beckoned stealthily to Jeanne, who got up at once, and slipped unnoticed out of the room.

'Well?' she said eagerly, as soon as she had joined the old nurse in the hall.

'Well—he has arrived; he is waiting for you in the dining-room. Come here, that I may arrange your hair; you have lost half-a-dozen hair-pins.'

But Jeanne, waving the old woman off, passed quickly into the dining-room, and closed the door behind her.

A tall young man was standing, with his hands in his pockets, looking out of the window and whistling softly. He whisked round at the noise of Jeanne's entrance, and showed a handsome, oval, beardless face, which broke into smiles as he embraced his sister.

'You good old Jeanne!' he cried. 'I knew you would not be long in coming after you had heard of my arrival. And how are you? And what have you been doing with yourself all these weeks? I shall make it a habit to go away oftener, that I may the oftener have the pleasure of seeing your dear old face again. You may

believe me or not as you like, but it is infinitely the most beautiful face I ever saw, alive or painted.'

Jeanne laughed and sighed in a breath. 'How long will you think that, I wonder?' she said.

'As long as I live,' replied the young man with conviction. 'I flatter myself I am not a bad judge, and I assure you that there is not a woman in the world to compare with you. I am not alone in my opinion either, let me tell you.'

'I don't care what other people think of me,' she answered quickly. 'If you love me better than anyone else, that is all I want.'

'You are glad to have me back, then?'

'Glad!' Jeanne threw an emphasis into the word which ought to have satisfied her hearer. She clung to him, and kissed him again and again with a vehemence which, Frenchman as he was, disconcerted him a little. He reddened slightly, and laughed as he gently disengaged himself.

'One would think you meant to stifle me,' he said. 'What would your friends in the drawing-room say, if they could see you? They would hardly recognise the statuesque Mademoiselle de Mersac.'

'I am not Mademoiselle de Mersac to you; I

am Jeanne, who is quite another person. Jeanne has many defects which are not apparent in Mademoiselle de Mersac—that of inquisitiveness amongst others. Come and sit down in the arm-chair, and tell me all about England and the *famille* Ashley.'

Léon seated himself. 'The *famille* Ashley,' said he, with a shrug of his shoulders, 'resembles all other English families; and as for their country, I left it without any desire to see it again. All that one has read of the climate of that island is not in the least exaggerated—quite the contrary. During the whole time that I was at my uncle's house we saw the sun twice, and even then you could hardly have distinguished him from the moon.'

'It is a bad time of the year to go to England, I suppose. But the people—what were they like?'

'Our relations you mean? *Ma foi!* it is not so easy to describe them: they are so very like all their compatriots. Figure to yourself a *bon papa anglais*, bald, rosy, stout; a mother of a family, badly dressed, rather untidy, always in a hurry; two young misses with pretty faces and fair hair, but with feet of a size that would make you

shudder, and ill-fitting, one-buttoned gloves—there you have the party. The sons are away from home—in the army, in the navy—I know not where. They received me very kindly, these good people; but I did not amuse myself very well in their house. You know I have not your love for the English. I find them rude and brusque, and I do not understand the jokes at which they laugh so immoderately. I was very dull *chez mon oncle.* Twice we went to the *chasse au renard*, and they were so kind as to compliment me upon my riding; other days we shot pheasants, of which there is a great abundance in the neighbourhood; but, as my uncle has no *chasse* of his own, we could only do this by invitation, and there were several days on which I was left to be entertained by my aunt and cousins. Ah! *par exemple*, it was then that I wished myself back in Algiers. The misses are a little insipid: they visit the poor; they do a great deal of fancy work; they drink tea half the afternoon; they have not much conversation. After dinner my uncle falls asleep and snores; I play a *partie* of billiards with the ladies; and then comes the evening prayer. I, as a Catholic, am invited to retire, if the ceremony offends my prejudices. I

reply that I am not a bigot; and the ladies smile upon me. Then the servants make their entry—a formidable array. The butler and the housekeeper seat themselves upon chairs; but the others, to mark the inferiority of their position, I presume, carry in a long bench, and perch themselves uncomfortably upon it; some of them appear ill at ease, and breathe noisily. My uncle puts on his spectacles and reads a chapter hastily, stumbling over the long words. Generally one of the dogs barks, and the misses titter behind their hands. When we rise from our knees everybody goes to bed, and I seek my room disconsolately, not being sleepy, and longing for tobacco. On the second night I take my courage in both hands and ask permission to smoke a cigar somewhere. My uncle, who does not smoke himself, has no *fumoir* in his establishment; so I am led by the butler to a little dark room in the basement, where there are black-beetles. He gives me a candle and bids me good night. It is not gay. There, my sister, you have life at Holmhurst. One day resembles another, as the clothes, the habits, the pleasures of one Englishman resemble those of another. It is a country of monotony, and there is nothing the average Englishman dreads so much as being

different from his neighbours. Here and there, no doubt, there are exceptions; and it was my good fortune to come across such a one in the person of a certain Mr. Barrington, a neighbour of the Ashleys, who, I must admit, has all the good qualities of his nation without its faults. He has travelled a great deal; he speaks very good French; he is without insular prejudices; he is a rider, a shot, a dancer, an artist—in short, everything that he does he does admirably. I owe it to him that I did not perish of *ennui* at that terrible Holmhurst. He is a man altogether *hors ligne*.'

'You are as enthusiastic as ever, Léon,' remarked Jeanne, smiling. 'You can praise no one by halves.'

'Oh, as for that, everybody joins in praising Mr. Barrington! They rave about him in his province; and as he has a nice little property of his own and has no near relations, I leave you to guess whether the young ladies of the neighbourhood look upon him with favourable eyes. I think even that the eldest of the Ashley misses would willingly consent to make his happiness. But he has assured me that he means to remain a bachelor for the present; he is not the man to marry *la première venue*.'

'It seems that he appreciates his own value—your friend.'

'Not at all; he is the most modest man in the world. For the rest, you will probably see him to-morrow, and will be able to judge for yourself.'

'What? Is he here, then?' asked Jeanne, in some surprise.

Léon nodded. 'He generally goes abroad for a month or two at this time of the year; and as he had never been in Algeria I easily persuaded him to accompany me home. I am sure he will please you—even you, who detest all men. *Tenez*, he has this advantage, Mr. Barrington—that, being a heretic, the Duchess cannot wish you to marry him.'

'Certainly that is a point in his favour,' observed Jeanne, gravely. 'And where have you left this paragon?'

'At the Hôtel d'Orient. It was there that I met Saint-Luc; and I thought it a good opportunity to introduce him to Mr. Barrington, who might have found it a little dull, having no friends in the place.'

'So that was the reason of your staying to breakfast with M. de Saint-Luc? And I was so

unjust as to blame you for not coming home immediately,' said Jeanne, with much contrition. 'I might have known that you would not remain away for your own pleasure.'

Léon laughed a little uneasily. He was very young, and had an intermittent conscience, which asserted itself now and then—not always at the most appropriate times.

'I wanted to see Saint-Luc on my own account, also,' he confessed; 'I had a note from him, while I was away, about the grey horse which he wished to buy of me; and I have the pleasure to announce to you that I have now disposed of that valuable animal on very favourable terms.'

'The grey is a little gone in both fore-legs; M. de Saint-Luc knows that very well,' said Jeanne quickly.

'That has not prevented him from giving me his little brown ponies in exchange for him,' replied Léon, with modest triumph. 'It is not a bad bargain, is it? Saint-Luc told me you had driven them once, and were delighted with them.'

'You cannot dispose of the grey upon those terms,' said Jeanne decisively. 'M. de Saint-Luc must be perfectly well aware that the grey is not worth as much as one of his ponies.'

'That may or may not be; but it was he who suggested the exchange.'

'Naturally; I never imagined that you would have proposed anything so absurd. The affair is not difficult to understand. M. de Saint-Luc has probably his reasons for wishing to be agreeable to you, and therefore he offers you his ponies at less than half their proper price. It is the purest impertinence.'

'It is a pleasant form of impertinence at least,' returned Léon, laughing. '*Parbleu!* I wish a few other people would take it into their heads to be impertinent in the same way.'

'You do not understand,' said Jeanne, in great vexation. 'Do you not see that M. de Saint-Luc is making you a present?'

'No, I don't,' answered Léon; 'I don't see it at all. A horse is not like a measure of oats or corn; you can't put a definite price upon him and say, "That is his real actual value in the market." Saint-Luc has taken a fancy to the grey, and is determined to have him. I may think this or that about the horse; and you say he is weak in his fore-legs—an opinion which may possibly be a mistaken one; but Saint-Luc has had plenty of opportunities of judging for himself as to that.

If a man offers me a certain price for a certain article, am I bound to tell him that, in my idea, he is bidding too highly? Believe me, my dear Jeanne, in this wicked world every man looks after his own interests; and as for what you say about the giving of presents, I never yet heard of an instance of a present being given in the way you suggest. People who give presents like to be thanked for them, I can assure you; and——'

'Madame la Duchesse sends to inform M. le Marquis that she waits him in the *salon*,' said a servant, putting in his head at this juncture; and so the remainder of Léon's harangue upon the way of the world remained unspoken.

The truth was that the young man attributed to his own acuteness the unquestionable fact that he had concluded an excellent bargain; and was, consequently, neither more nor less pleased with himself than the generality of his elders would have been in a similar case.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. BARRINGTON.

Mr. Barrington, making his way leisurely up the steep streets of the Arab town on the day following that of his arrival in Algiers, and observing, with eyes appreciative of colour and outline, a hundred perfect little pictures of Oriental life as he went, marvelled greatly that it had never occurred to him before to visit so charming a city. Mr. Barrington was an amateur artist, and therefore, of course, even more prone to the discovery of picturesque effects than a professional wielder of the brush and maulstick. The high white houses that rose on either side of the narrow street—windowless generally, or at most with but a small grated aperture or two close under the overhanging roof; the projecting wooden buttresses that flung long blue shadows upon the whitewash; the broad glossy-leaved bananas and sombre cypresses that reared their

heads, here and there, above the walls, suggesting visions of cool courtyards and luxurious Eastern interiors to the artistic mind; the tiny shops—mere recesses in the wall—whose owners sat cross-legged smoking their long pipes, in apparently absolute indifference to the sale of their wares—all these were to him novel and delightful sights. Overhead, the strip of sky was of a deep melting blue; the sun caught the upper part of the houses, but left the basements in deep shadow; before him the street trended upwards in broad shallow steps, down which all sorts of queerly-costumed figures came to meet him. Now it was a grave, majestic Moor, his burnous thrown over his shoulder and displaying his gay-coloured jacket and ample nether garments; now a grey-bearded Jew shrinking along close to the wall in the cat-like way peculiar to his race; now a Mauresque, enveloped in fold upon fold of white, her black eyes gleaming through her yashmak; now a stalwart negress in blue and white checked haik. Mr. Barrington surveyed them all with benevolent approbation. Indeed, the habitual expression of this young man's features was one of good-humoured patronage. The world had always treated him so well that the

least he could do was to smile back upon it; and from his childhood he had had so much of his own way, and rough places had been made so smooth for him, that it was scarcely strange if he looked upon most men and things from an imaginary standpoint rather above than below them.

Left an orphan almost in his infancy, he had been brought up by a small junta of uncles and aunts who had done their best to spoil him, and who, to his mind, had very efficiently replaced the parents whom he could scarcely remember; and upon attaining his majority he had stepped into a comfortable property, together with a fortune not so large as to be embarrassing, yet large enough to make him what most people would consider a rich man. He was now about thirty years of age, and had never known an ache or a pain, a care or a sorrow, worth speaking of, in his life. Without having any special title to beauty of feature, he was nevertheless pleasant to look upon, having big bones, well-developed muscles, and perfect health. He was the incarnation of prosperity and contentment. Crossing-sweepers approached him with confidence; and when he took his place upon the magisterial

bench the heart of the poacher rejoiced. As a good landlord, a good sportsman, a tolerable linguist, and a lover of the arts, he had claims upon the sympathies of various classes of society; and in fact few men could have enjoyed a larger acquaintance or a more widely-spread popularity than he. He made friends with everybody. He had made friends with Léon, he had made friends already with M. de Saint-Luc, and he was now on his way to call at the Campagne de Mersac and make friends with the young lady of whom he had received a description from her brother which had somewhat excited his curiosity. He had none of the shyness with which many Englishmen are afflicted, experience having taught him to look for a hearty welcome wherever he went; nor had he any disturbing doubts as to the nature of his reception in this particular instance.

Emerging from the tortuous streets of the Arab town, and passing through the Kasbah, or citadel, in which it culminates, to the open country beyond, he turned—not to take breath—he was too sound, wind and limb, to require any such respite—but to feast his eyes upon the glorious prospect that lay beneath him.

'Good heavens!' he muttered, 'what a queer,

uneven business life is, and how few people ever get a chance of knowing the beauty of the world they live in! How I should like to turn a whole town-full of factory hands out here for a day or two!'

A drove of little donkeys, laden with sacks of earth, came pattering down the road behind him, their driver, clothed in ragged sackcloth, seated sideways very close to the tail of the last of them, and swinging his bronze legs while he urged on his charges with guttural cries.

'Now look at that fellow,' moralised Barrington. 'Thousands in London, not a bit worse off than he, are leading lives of the most utter and hopeless misery; and as for him, he looks as jolly as a sandboy—by Jove! he *is* a sandboy, or at least an earthboy, which, I suppose, is much the same—odd thing that! Yes, there you have the effect of air and sunshine. Well, one can't ship all St. Giles's over here; and perhaps Bushey Park would be more in their line, after all.'

Consoled by this reflection, he pulled out of his pocket the note-book which, like a man of method as he was, he always carried about him, and noted down: '*Mem.* Send cheque to Drudgett to give poor people a day in the country when warm weather comes.'—Drudgett being a

hard-working parson in an East London parish. After which he resumed his walk.

His charity was mostly of this kind. It did not cost him very much; but it was not, on that account, the less welcome, and it had earned him a name for benevolence which extended beyond the limits of his own county.

Mr. Barrington, although he had mixed a good deal with foreigners, and prided himself upon nothing so much as his cosmopolitan character, had all an Englishman's dislike to asking his way. He therefore made several unnecessary circuits, and presented himself at the doors of two villas before he discovered the one of which he was in search.

'M. le Marquis was out,' the servant said, who answered his ring; 'but Madame la Duchesse was at home. Would monsieur give himself the trouble to enter?'

Monsieur consented willingly. He was always ready to make fresh acquaintances; and though he had not the remotest idea of who Madame la Duchesse might be, he was not at all reluctant to introduce himself to her.

'Presumably an elderly relative of our young friend,' he thought, as he followed the servant

across the hall, and heard himself announced as 'M. de Barainton.'

The Duchess, on her side, knew perfectly well who her visitor was, having heard all about him from Léon on the previous evening; but, for all that, it did not suit her to manifest any immediate recognition of the stranger's identity. She had always been a very punctilious person, even in the days of her supremacy in Paris, and was tenfold more so in these latter times, when there seemed to be occasional danger of her claims to veneration being ignored.

Nor was she over-well pleased by the easy, unembarrassed manner in which Mr. Barrington introduced himself, explained the origin of his acquaintance with her godson, and, seating himself beside her, entered at once into conversation in free and fluent French. She had often complained of English *gaucherie*; but, at the bottom of her heart, she thought a little timidity on entering her presence not out of place in a young man. So, for once in his life, Mr. Barrington failed to make a favourable impression.

Some extracts from a rather lengthy epistle which he despatched a few days later to a friend in England may be appropriately inserted here:—

'That old Duchesse de Breuil was a charming study; I never met with a more perfect type of a great lady of the *vieille roche.* She has a fine hook nose, and faded, sunken blue eyes; her hair is as white as snow—just as it ought to be; she wore a dress of stone-grey silk so rich, and at the same time so soft, that I would have asked her where she got it if I had not been afraid; and her withered old neck and wrists were half-concealed by clouds of old yellow Mechlin lace. I don't think very old people can ever be beautiful, looked upon as human beings; but they may undoubtedly be beautiful as pictures; and this dear old soul, sitting bolt upright in her armchair by the fire-place, holding up a huge black fan to shield her from the blaze, was quite a gem in her way. I could have sat and looked at her with perfect contentment for half an hour; only the bother was one had to talk, and, for some reason or other, she didn't choose to exert her conversational powers. I was just beginning to feel rather bored, and was thinking about taking my leave, when the door opened and in walked—the goddess Minerva. Pallas-Athenè herself, I give you my word—in a brown holland gown—and, oh! how I wished the fashions of this inartistic age

had permitted her to wear her ancient costume of sleeveless tunic, peplus, helmet, and lance! Her modern name is Mademoiselle Jeanne de Mersac; and she held out her hand to me and began talking in a grave, condescending sort of way about England and her cousins the Ashleys, just as if she had been an ordinary mortal. Her voice was very soft and musical—rather deep for a woman; but that is no defect. I called her Pallas-Athenè because she is so tall and proud and cold; but she is not γλαυκῶπις; on the contrary, her eyes are large, brown, and soft, like Juno's, and she is as graceful as the Venus Anadyomene, and as free and stately in her gait as Diana the huntress. So you see she is altogether divine. There was a time when I must have fallen head over ears in love with her on the spot; but you and I, old man, have left that era behind us. *Militavi non sine gloriâ.* I have gone through a fair share of flirtations in my day, and have had one or two narrow shaves of matrimony; now I am grown tough with years about the region of the heart, and can worship beauty from a purely æsthetic point of view, and without *arrière pensée.* I am too old a bird to fall unwarily into the meshes of the fowler. Not that I mean to insinuate that

Mademoiselle de Mersac is spreading a net for me, which will, I know, be the first idea to suggest itself to your coarse mind. Heaven forbid! I am blushing all over, as I write, at the bare thought of such profanity. Mademoiselle de Mersac has no need to angle for a husband. She might marry anybody, and has already refused many brilliant offers, giving it to be understood, I believe, that her intention is to remain unmarried, in order that she may be the freer to give herself up to the care of her brother, who is a decent young fellow enough, but is all the better, I daresay, for having a protecting goddess to warn him off from occasional dangers, such as harpies, sirens, and so forth. It certainly seems possible that, being now come to years of discretion, he may soon find a sister's supervision superfluous; and it is also not unlikely that Mademoiselle Jeanne may eventually see fit to modify the programme she has laid down for herself; but in the meantime the spectacle of a woman who really does not want to get married is a novel and refreshing one. You, who go in for cynicism of a more or less shallow kind, and who think yourself clever for discovering a selfish motive at the root of all your neighbours' actions, should be the first to admit this.

'The picturesque old Duchess, who is worldly-wise and experienced, is racking her wits and breaking her heart in the effort to "establish" Mademoiselle Jeanne; but as yet she has only succeeded in inspiring the young lady with a profound mistrust of, and prejudice against, all members of the male sex. This, of course, you don't believe; but I can't help that. Mademoiselle is charitable and visits the poor, Arab and Christian alike; but her good deeds are mostly done *sub rosâ*—just what I should have expected of her. She is kind and generous to poor, timid, or ugly people; but a little inclined to be haughty towards those with whom the world goes well—there again I recognise the character which I was sure from the first must go with so superb a physique. By the poor she is adored, but she is less popular among her equals. Few people understand her; some dislike her; but all admire her. There is a prevalent notion that when her brother marries she will take the veil.

'The greater part of this information I have gleaned from a certain Vicomte de Saint-Luc, who is staying at this hotel—a half-ruined Parisian of the new school, who gets his clothes from an English tailor, rides in steeple-chases at Vin-

cennes, plays baccarat all night, and sleeps all day. You know the kind of man—or rather, on second thoughts, you probably don't; but I do, and it is not a type that I much admire. I suspect him of being somewhat *épris* of Mademoiselle, or her fortune—she *has* a fortune of her own, by-the-by—but I don't imagine he has much chance of success. He is going to sell me a horse; and I daresay he will try to get the better of me. I flatter myself he won't find that a particularly easy task.

'Well, after all I have said about this divine Mademoiselle de Mersac, you will understand, without my telling you, that I shall never be content till I have got her to sit to me. The question is, in what pose and surroundings to take her. In her garden there is a little fountain which splashes lazily into a marble basin where there are water-lilies. All round it are standard rose-trees; and for background you have a row of black cypresses, with the blue sky showing between and above them. I thought of painting her standing there, dressed all in white, with perhaps a pomegranate blossom in her hair, and looking out upon you from the frame with her great solemn eyes. But then, again, I don't know that

I should not like her better half-reclining on a low divan—there are several such in the de Mersacs' drawing-room—with a panther-skin at her feet, and a hand-screen made of a palmetto-leaf in her hand. Over the back of the couch one would throw one of those Arab rugs that they make at Tlemcen, in which all the colours of the rainbow, and a great many more, meet, but never "swear." There would be a glimpse of sharp-pointed arches and clustered marble pillars for background; and the light would fall from above. But the fact is, that she would look well in any posture; and I can't imagine a situation that would be unbecoming to her.

'Of course I have not had the audacity to broach the subject yet; nor shall I, until we have become a good deal better acquainted than we are at present. However, as I am determined that the picture shall be painted, I haven't much doubt as to my ultimate success; and, indeed, Mademoiselle was very gracious to me—more so, I believe, than she is to the generality of visitors. Saint-Luc says this is because I am not a possible suitor; and that if I had been a Frenchman she would not have troubled herself to address two words to me. I don't know how this may be;

but, at all events, I think I may congratulate myself upon having made some advance towards intimacy in the course of my first interview. It was rather uphill work at starting; but I exerted all my powers to be amusing, and at length I succeeded in making her laugh a little, which was a great point gained. Even the old Duchess thawed when she found that I was acquainted with some of her friends in the Faubourg, and was good enough to entertain me with some long yarns about Talleyrand and Polignac and the Duchesse de Berri. Then young de Mersac came in and offered to drive me home; and so I took my leave. We rattled down to the town at no end of a pace—the way these Frenchmen drive down hill is a caution!—but we arrived without broken bones at the hotel, where we found M. de Saint-Luc; and presently my young friend and he went off to dine together somewhere. They were so kind as to invite me to join them; but as I heard something about baccarat, and as that is a game which I have played in Paris, *consule Planco*, and don't mean to play again, except perhaps in the company of sober folks like you, I excused myself, and dined at the *table-d'hôte*. We had green peas at dinner, and this morning they

brought me bananas and strawberries, and the most delicious little mandarin oranges, with my breakfast. I am writing by my open window, and it is so hot that I have had to close the outside shutters. And the last thing you said to me before I left was, that you couldn't understand a fellow going out of England before the hunting was over! Gracious powers! aren't oranges, and bananas, and sunshine, and Mademoiselle de Mersac worth six weeks of indifferent hunting? I enjoy a good day's sport as much as anybody, but, thank heaven! I can enjoy other things as well. Most men lose half the pleasures of life because they will select one pursuit and stick to it; it is the greatest mistake in the world. Now, I——'

Here the letter proceeds to treat discursively of various topics, and ceases to have any bearing upon matters connected with the present history.

CHAPTER V.

M. DE SAINT-LUC.

Charles Casimir Louis, Vicomte de Saint-Luc, had, for more years than he cared accurately to reckon up, enjoyed a considerable amount of notoriety and admiration in the gay world of Paris. A member of the Jockey Club, a duellist of proved skill and intrepidity, a leader of cotillons in the most fashionable salons, a bold gamester, and an imperturbable loser, he seemed to have fulfilled all the conditions necessary to being considered a fine gentleman by the *habitués* of the society which he frequented. Among the *ignobile vulgus*, too, which, in France even more than in England, is liable to be dazzled by profusion, glitter, and display, his name had become a familiar word; nor did his well-known colours ever fail to elicit applause at Longchamps, La Marche, or Vincennes, especially when, as was

often the case, the noble owner was himself the wearer of them.

M. de Saint-Luc had begun life as a sub-lieutenant in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, in which distinguished corps he had risen to the rank of captain before the death of his father, a quiet old gentleman, the greater part of whose life had been spent parsimoniously upon his estate in Normandy, placed him in command of a very respectable fortune.

The young Vicomte, to whom a vast supply of ready money was an altogether new and delightful sensation, immediately abandoned his military career, took a commodious flat in the Chaussée d'Antin, and set to work to enjoy life in Paris, where his handsome face, his lively manners, and his superb indifference to expenditure soon made him a prime favourite with both sexes. In a very short time he had achieved a reputation. A few duels, a cleverly-won race or two, and a suspicion of sundry *bonnes fortunes* sufficed to place him very near to the highest eminence of fame attainable by those who lived the life which he had adopted. All the opera-glasses in the house were brought to bear upon him when he lounged into his place at the

Italiens or the *Français*; he could not walk a hundred yards from his door without becoming aware that the passers-by were nudging one another and whispering his name; the horrible little newspapers, which busy themselves with such subjects, chronicled his extravagances, and called upon their readers to admire his freaks; provincials gaped at him; fine ladies ogled him; he was envied by his inferiors, and emulated by his equals. At the time of the Exhibition of 1867, though at that time he was already a little past the zenith of his glory, he was pointed out to foreigners as a worthy representative of high life under the Second Empire. It was, perhaps, no great honour to be thus distinguished; but, such as it was, hundreds of Parisians would have given their ears to share it. As the times are so will the men be; and the times just then were bad, in more ways than one. An idle Englishman, with a sufficiency of money in his pocket, may, and from the nature of his position probably will, succeed in leading a life which, if not profitable, is, at any rate, in a great measure healthy and manly, even if he have no higher object before him than pleasure; but the resources of a Frenchman, similarly situated, are far more restricted, and seldom

extend beyond the walls of a town. To rise at mid-day, to dawdle through the afternoon in paying visits or driving in the Bois, to look in at the theatre or at a ball during the evening, and to devote the rest of the twenty-four hours to gambling, may not seem a specially inviting programme to look forward to for the remainder of a man's days; such, however, in so far as it is possible to indicate it here, was the mode of killing time chosen by M. de Saint-Luc and his friends, and very few of them were ever heard to complain of it. Habit, which renders most things supportable—else, where could you find coal-miners, stokers, or dentists?—had so inured these gentlemen to their manner of life that most of them really believed their lot to be an enviable one.

To do the Vicomte justice, such was not his opinion. After three or four years of Parisian life he became heartily sick of the whole business. He grew tired of astonishing people, and ceased to care in the least whether they were astonished or not. He wearied of the eternal mill-round of so-called pleasure, and longed to escape from it, without very well seeing his way to do so. In cards only he found some remnant of excitement; but then the cards were not always propitious,

and, as his income dwindled, he began to think that they also were vanity. Wandering home forlornly, in the grey morning, with empty pockets, an aching head, grimy hands, and an utter distaste and disgust for the world, he not unfrequently asked himself whether it would not be best to put a pistol to his head, and have done with it. Generally he answered the question in the affirmative; but there he stopped. 'One has always plenty of time to kill oneself,' he would reflect as he tumbled into bed; and the next evening saw him seated before the card-table again as usual.

So time went on, and symptoms of crow's-feet began to manifest themselves about the corners of M. de Saint-Luc's eyes, and a grey hair or two cropped up about the region of his temples, and with each succeeding year his banker's book became a less agreeable study. How long he might have maintained his position in the front rank of Parisian society if his horse had come in first for the *Grand Prix* of 1869, it is impossible to say; but it was M. Lupin's *Glaneur* who won the race, and our poor Vicomte drove home, down the crowded Champs Elysées, with a face somewhat graver than usual, and an uncomfortable

suspicion that he was very nearly ruined. He looked into his affairs with an ultimate result less discouraging than he had ventured to hope for. He found that, after paying all outstanding debts, and disposing of his stud and other superfluities, there would remain to him an income sufficient for moderate comfort, besides his château and estates in Normandy. This Norman château, which he had hitherto visited barely once a year during the shooting season, should henceforth, he determined, be his home. He had been one of the bright particular stars of the Parisian firmament, and preferred extinction to diminished shining as an indistinguishable member of the nebulæ which had once surrounded him.

One fine day in the end of June, therefore, the Vicomte de Saint-Luc might have been seen taking his ticket at the station of Saint-Lazare, while his servant watched over a pile of luggage whose imposing dimensions sufficiently showed that its owner was bound upon no ordinary pleasure-trip. '*Adieu, Paris ; adieu, nos beaux jours !*' muttered the Vicomte, as he installed himself in a corner of the railway carriage.

In thus turning his back upon old associations M. de Saint-Luc had, as a matter of course, con-

templated marriage as an essential part of his scheme for the future. He did not much want to be married; but that was not the question. To live in the country as a bachelor would be insupportable; besides, it was the recognised thing that a landed proprietor should marry after a certain age. He had heroically resolved to abandon pleasure in favour of dull respectability, and a wife and children were among the lesser evils which he anticipated from the change. But before he had been a day in the home of his fathers he perceived the impossibility of asking any lady to share it with him while in its present condition, and fully realised how necessary it was that the future Vicomtesse should have her share of this world's gear.

M. de Saint-Luc's château was situated, not in that sunshiny, apple-bearing, prosperous Normandy so familiar to English tourists, but in the less frequented and bleaker district which forms the north-western extremity of the province. With its steep roofs and its wrought-iron balconies, it was a sufficiently picturesque object in the landscape, and the woods which surrounded it looked doubly green, cool and leafy by contrast with the heathy moorland which stretched away

from them to the seaward. But then picturesqueness and comfort are so seldom allied! The house was cold, damp, and mildewed; it had been uninhabited, so far at least as its *salons* and best bedrooms were concerned, for many years, and the rats, the mice, and the moths had had it all their own way with the furniture. As for the domain, that was well enough in fine summer weather. The neglected garden, the moss-grown sundial, the broken statues, the marble balustrades stained with the rain and snow of many winters, the pond where the ancient carp were, the dense woods and the long grassy avenues that intersected them—all these had a peaceful, dignified repose not unpleasing to a jaded Parisian. There was a charm, too, in the healthy freedom of the moors, where a salt-laden wind always blew freshly, where you might gallop for leagues without injuring anybody's crops, and where a gentleman who had won steeple-chases in his time might indulge himself occasionally by popping over a stone wall. It was in this way that M. de Saint-Luc employed the greater portion of his days, his rides not unfrequently terminating at the neighbouring château of M. de Marcigny, whose charming wife—a lady of fashion, whom Saint-

Luc had known ever since he had known fashionable society at all—had charged herself with the delicate task of finding a suitable mate for the reformed Vicomte.

He got through the summer satisfactorily enough, on the whole, though not without occasional hankerings after the flesh-pots of Egypt; but his heart began to sink with the fall of the leaf, and early in October his courage failed him altogether. For then the mighty south-west wind arose in his strength, and roaring in, day after day, from the Atlantic, with pelting rain and driving mist, stripped the tossing boughs, whistled through the ill-fitting windows of the château, and finally sent the Vicomte to bed with such a cold and cough as he had never had before in his life. The days were bad enough, but the nights were simply appalling. When the old woman who officiated as his housekeeper had brought him his *lait-de poule*, and stolen away, after wishing him good night, Saint Luc could not sleep for the awful and unaccountable noises that became audible in the deserted corridors. Such ghostly rustlings and moanings, such a weird, nameless stirring, reached his ears from the unoccupied rooms, that he was fain to slip out of bed and

lock his door. Every now and again a gust of wind whirled away a loose slate from the roof with crash and clatter.

On the third day Saint-Luc got up and dressed himself, vowing that he could not and would not stand this any longer. He ordered his horse and galloped off, through the rain, to see Madame de Marcigny, whom he found packing up her trunks.

'What, madame, do you, too, desert us?' he exclaimed in dismay.

'We leave for Paris to-morrow,' she answered: 'I adore the country, but I detest bad weather; and I see by your face that you share my opinion. You know I always told you you would renounce your project of living in Normandy from January to December.'

'You were right, madame, as you always are. I renounce everything—château, wife, respectability—all! I have the *mal du pays.* What the Ranz des Vaches is to the Swiss, and the *cornemuse* to the Scot, that is the asphalte of Paris to me. A whiff of it would bring the tears into my eyes. Only, as I have sworn never to live in Paris again, I think I will spend my winter at Nice. There, at last, I shall meet friends, I shall perhaps get rid of this cough which is shaking me to pieces,

and I can finish ruining myself pleasantly at Monaco.'

'If I were you, my friend,' said Madame de Marcigny gravely, 'I would remain away from Monaco.'

'Your advice is excellent, madame,' answered Saint-Luc, with a smile and a bow; 'but, unhappily, I know myself too well to imagine that I shall have the fortitude to follow it. If I go to Nice, you may be sure that M. Blanc will profit by my residence in the South.'

Madame de Marcigny considered.

'Then do not go to Nice,' she said at length. 'Go rather to Algiers. You will be at home there—you who have served in the Chasseurs d'Afrique and fought against Abd-el-Kader; you will find a charming climate and an agreeable society; and, what is best of all, you will make acquaintance with Mademoiselle de Mersac.'

'And who is Mademoiselle de Mersac, if you please?'

'Well, I cannot tell you much about her, except that she is young, well provided for and exceptionally beautiful, and that she is the niece—or some other relation—of my old friend the Duchesse de Breuil, who is anxious to establish

her, and to whom I will give you an introduction. It seems to me that she may be worth the trouble of a journey to Algeria.'

Thus it came about that M. de Saint-Luc presented himself, one day, at the Campagne de Mersac, and was received by the Duchess with the friendliness due to a gentleman of ancient lineage and a *protégé* of Madame de Marcigny. He was not disinclined to marry the young lady whose advantages had been enumerated to him as above recorded—or, indeed, any young lady equally eligible; but he felt no enthusiasm or interest about her, and certainly had no suspicion of the influence that she was destined to exercise upon his future life. At what age, and after how much experience, dare a man consider himself superior to the absurd passion of love at first sight? Saint-Luc, whose amours had been so many that he had forgotten three-fourths of them, and who could no longer be called a young man, except by courtesy, might perhaps, without undue arrogance, have smiled at the notion that he could be assailed by any such malady; yet, after he had passed a quarter of an hour in the same room with Jeanne de Mersac and had exchanged half-a-dozen sentences with her, he returned to his hotel conscious

of a singular inward change, and, at the end of a week, was fain to admit to himself, not without consternation, that, for the first time in his life, he was really in love. He was half-happy, half-vexed, at the discovery. It was not displeasing to him, as a man whose lease of existence, according to the Biblical standard, had already run into its second term, to find that some remnant of the freshness of youth still clung to him; but, on the other hand, it was a little ridiculous to lose one's heart to a beautiful face, like a raw boy from Saint-Cyr. Moreover, it is inconvenient to be in love with your wife. Great passions do not suit with domesticity; or so, at least, the Vicomte thought. However, whether for good or for evil, this strange thing had befallen him, and could not be striven against, so he lost no time in adopting what he believed to be the proper line of conduct in such circumstances. He went to the Duchess, announced his desire, and laid before her an estimate of his income as nearly correct as he could make it. He was met with a reply which somewhat staggered him.

'As far as I am concerned,' the Duchess said, 'I should be charmed if this alliance could be arranged; but, unhappily, the decision rests neither

with me nor with the young Marquis, but with Jeanne herself. It is absurd, it is unreasonable, but it is so. My poor friend, the late Marquis, took it into his head to marry an Englishwoman, from whom he imbibed I know not what fantastic notions, which, among other results, have had that of causing me an immensity of annoyance and trouble.' Here the Duchess expatiated at some length upon the inconvenience occasioned to her by Jeanne's independence of authority. '*Il vous faudra lui faire la cour*, *monsieur*,' she concluded, spreading out her hands and raising her shoulders. 'It is a troublesome process if you will—I am not sure that it is even *convenable*; but it is the only way that I know of to gain her for your wife. Nothing that I can say will influence her in the least—that I can promise you; but you have my best wishes. You see I treat you with perfect frankness: if you think the prize is not worth the time and exertion it will cost you (and I warn you in advance that you will have to expend a great deal of both, and also a large supply of patience), I shall not be astonished.

Saint-Luc answered, with a smile, that if nothing more than labour and patience were demanded of him, these should not be wanting on his part.

He did not allow the Duchess to suppose that he entertained any warmer feeling for Mademoiselle de Mersac than that safe one of esteem which Frenchmen consider the surest basis of matrimonial felicity; but he secretly rejoiced in the prospect of winning so beautiful a bride by some more romantic method than that which had at first suggested itself to him, and perhaps thought the task would not prove so difficult a one as the old lady seemed to anticipate.

If he did deem success a probability he was not wholly inexcusable in so thinking. Fortune had smiled so persistently upon him in all his previous *affaires de cœur* that he was entitled, without inordinate vanity, to consider himself a favourite with the fair sex. Was it likely that he who had known how to please the great ladies of Paris would fail with an inexperienced girl whose life had been passed in remote Algeria? Of course, as a matter of fact, nothing was more likely—inexperienced girls being usually far more exacting than women of the world, and the qualities which find favour in the eyes of the latter class being seldom those which recommend themselves to the former; but this Saint-Luc did not know. His acquaintance with feminine nature

was, indeed, far more restricted than he had supposed, and so he was fain to admit in the very initiation of his courtship. Advancing to the attack with easy confidence in his time-honoured system of tactics, he fell back, dismayed and bewildered, from the wall of icy impassibility behind which Jeanne entrenched herself. He had wit enough to perceive that his old weapons—compliments, killing glances, and small attentions—would be of little service to him here, but he did not see what efficient substitutes he could find for them. A passing remark of Jeanne's gave him a clue. Speaking of an old man whom everybody disliked, she said, 'He is not perfect; but, for all that, I will allow no one to speak against him before me. He was kind to Léon once, and whoever does Léon a kindness does one to me.' M. de Saint-Luc immediately resolved that he would cultivate Léon's acquaintance. It was not a happy inspiration. With the most innocent intentions in the world, he took to inviting the young man often to dine with him at his hotel; but the young man liked a game of cards, at the officers' club or elsewhere, after his dinner; and what could be more natural than that his entertainer should join in the amusement? So Léon generally got to bed at a

much later hour than was good for one whose avocations necessitated early rising; and Jeanne, discovering, without difficulty, the manner in which her brother's evenings were spent, set down the poor Vicomte as a corrupter of youth. She made a few inquiries about M. de Saint-Luc, and learned enough of his past career to confirm her bad opinion of him. Never prone to conceal her likes and dislikes, she now began to treat her unlucky admirer with a mixture of scorn and anger which must have disgusted him with her had he not been so very much in love. As it was, his passion was increased rather than diminished by Jeanne's harshness, though she often made him wince by her sharp speeches. She never lost an opportunity of snubbing him, and seemed to delight in causing him pain or humiliation; but he bore it all meekly enough, telling himself that by gentleness and perseverance he might conquer in the long run. Meanwhile he continued to be very civil to Léon, little supposing that by so doing he was injuring his own cause.

His chief object, indeed, in asking the young man to dinner was to have an excuse for talking about Jeanne—a subject upon which the latter was always ready to dilate with enthusiasm; but as for

Léon, it is to be feared that baccarat and lansquenet, not Saint-Luc's society, were the attractions that led him, night after night, to the Hôtel d'Orient.

'Don't let us waste any more time out here,' he said, one evening shortly after his return, when he had been dining with Saint-Luc as usual, and the pair were leaning over the parapet of the Boulevard de l'Impératrice, smoking their cigars in the moonlight. 'Doncourt and Delamarre and the rest must have been expecting us this last half-hour.'

It was a still, warm, cloudless night. The great white mosque in the Place du Gouvernement, the lighthouse at the end of the Mole, the silent ships in the harbour, and the gently heaving sea beyond, lay bathed in such a soft brilliant moonlight as we, in these Northern latitudes, have no knowledge of. The broad boulevard was thronged with loungers, Jew, Turk, and Christian; and in one of the cafés down by the waterside somebody was singing to the tinkling accompaniment of a guitar

'Let them expect us a little longer,' answered Saint-Luc; 'one can lose one's money any night of the year, but one cannot always have fine

weather. Here comes your English friend; let us ask him what he thinks. Mr. Barrington, is it not better to sit out here doing nothing than to spend the night over a card-table in an atmosphere laden with the fumes of bad cigars?'

'A great deal better, I should say,' replied Barrington, with a quick glance of distrust at Saint-Luc and of commiseration at Léon, which did not escape the notice of either of them. 'Take my advice, de Mersac, and don't play for high stakes; it is very nearly as exciting to play for *sous*, if you only knew it. For my own part, I gave up loo and lansquenet, and such games, years ago.'

'*M. Barrington a passé par là*,' said Léon, with a laugh, which imperfectly concealed some natural annoyance at being lectured; 'he has tasted all the forbidden pleasures, and found them worthless. As for me, I suppose I am not old enough or wise enough to give up cards.'

'And I,' remarked Saint-Luc, 'am too old. Life has not so many amusements that I can afford to sacrifice one of them; unless, indeed, I could discover some equivalent,' he added, with a half-sigh.

'Equivalent!' echoed Barrington, rather

scornfully. 'I don't know what your idea of an equivalent for gambling may be; but if you only look upon it as a means of making time pass, it ought not to be a hard matter to find some substitute for it.'

'Everybody has not your talents, monsieur,' returned Saint-Luc. 'You have art to fall back upon, which I, unfortunately, have not.'

'Oh, I don't pretend to any talent,' said Barrington generously. 'Anybody who is not colour-blind can learn to paint well enough to make an amusement for himself with a little study and perseverance; and, if he have no turn for drawing, he can easily take up something else. The world is full of pleasant occupations, if idle people would only take the trouble to look for them.'

Saint-Luc did not dispute the accuracy of the statement. He smiled, lighted a second cigar, and puffed at it in silence for a few minutes; then, 'Do you go to Madame de Trémonville's dance to-morrow, Léon?' he asked.

'Undoubtedly; and you?'

'I hardly know; it will depend upon how I may feel disposed when the time comes. She wearies me, this Madame de Trémonville, whom you admire so much. Has she sent an invitation to Madame la Duchesse, and your sister?'

Léon laughed. 'Madame de Trémonville does not want courage,' he said, 'but she has not yet had the audacity to ask the Duchess to one of her dances. I have been begged to bring Jeanne, though.'

'And will she go?'

'Ah! that I can't say. She is a little capricious, as all women are, even the best of them,' said Léon, who flattered himself that he had some acquaintance with this subject. 'Will you accompany us, Mr. Barrington? It may amuse you to have a glimpse of our Algerian society.'

'I don't know the lady,' answered Barrington.

'Oh! that is of no consequence; she will be delighted to receive any friend of mine. Shall I ask her to send you a card?'

'Thank you. I should like very much to go, especially if I am to have the pleasure of meeting Mademoiselle de Mersac. She did not say anything about it this morning.'

Saint-Luc stared. He had known Mademoiselle de Mersac much longer than this Englishman, but it had never occurred to him to take the liberty of calling upon her on any other day than that on which she was accustomed to receive visitors; still less would he have dreamt of enter-

ing her presence before three o'clock in the afternoon, at the earliest. He was fairly startled out of his good manners, and exclaimed, half involuntarily, 'You were at El-Biar this morning, monsieur?'

Barrington saw his dismay, and rather enjoyed it. 'I rode up after breakfast,' he answered; 'I wanted to try the horse you sold me.'

'And I hope you found him satisfactory,' said Saint-Luc, recovering himself.

Barrington would have liked to say that the horse was a little touched in the wind; but, not being quite sure of his French, had to smile and reply, 'Perfectly.'

'I am charmed to hear it. For the rest, I was sure you would be contented with him.—What is it, Léon? Ah, *mauvais sujet!* you are longing for the green cloth. As you will, then! Come, let us go and earn a headache for to-morrow morning. Monsieur will not be of the party? *Au revoir*, then.'

And so the two gamesters strolled away.

'Do you know,' said Léon, confidentially, as soon as they were out of earshot, 'I am not sure that I like Mr. Barrington so well as I did at first. Sometimes I think he is a little too conceited and dictatorial.'

'You say that because he gave you good advice,' laughed the other good-humouredly. 'Bah! he was right, *mon garçon*; high play leads to no good; and if my past gave me the right to offer advice to anyone, I should back him up. Unhappily for you, you made the acquaintance of a worthless fellow when you met me. What would you have? It is too late to mend now. *Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor.*'

And, having made this classic confession with a fine sonorous ring, the Vicomte linked his arm in that of his young friend, and led him through the open doors of the *Cercle*.

As for Barrington, he made his way back to the Hôtel d'Orient, and, happening to meet an acquaintance in the hall, took occasion to express his opinion of M. de Saint-Luc with perfect candour.

'A man who can find nothing better to do than to lead boys into mischief ought to be kicked,' said he. 'I don't know what name you have for that sort of fellow in French: in England we should call him a "leg."'

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DE TRÉMONVILLE'S DANCE.

It was admitted on all hands that Madame de Trémonville's entertainments were invariably brilliant and successful. Her abode was one of the most spacious of the many charming villas which cover the hillside of Mustapha; she never overcrowded her rooms, she paid special attention to the excellence of the refreshments provided; and she even affected a certain exclusiveness, declining to know people who had not something —whether beauty, rank, wealth, or talent—to recommend them. Without much difficulty she succeeded in becoming a leader of Algerian society, and those whom she invited to her soirées seldom sent her a refusal. The Duchesse de Breuil and a few other Legitimist ladies looked down upon her, it is true; but that was a matter of course. They would have looked down upon anybody whose husband held office under the

then existing Government, and this disdain gave Madame de Trémonville very little concern. She rather enjoyed an occasional passage-of-arms with Madame de Vaublanc; and for the rest she took good care that these ladies should recognise her when they met in any public place, and insisted upon visiting them, whether they liked it or not. 'It is *chic* to be upon good terms with the old noblesse,' she would sometimes say.

Her reputation was not wholly free from reproach; nor was she well spoken of by the ladies of her acquaintance. As, however, nothing had as yet been proved against her, as she was very hospitable, and, as she had a retentive memory and a sharp tongue, she was always able to fill her ball-room with members of the best society Algiers could produce.

Barrington, whom Léon in fulfilment of his promise duly escorted to Madame de Trémonville's next dance, was enchanted with the scene that met his eye as he passed through the doorway, where the mistress of the house stood smiling impartially upon each fresh arrival. The large square room into which he looked, with its white walls, its polished *parquet* and its multitude of lights, was all ablaze with showy uniforms and

jewels. As far as appearance went, Madame de Trémonville's modest *salon* might have been the reception-room of an ambassadress—so closely do ordinary mortals resemble their more exalted brethren if decked out in sufficiently fine clothes. The ladies were all well dressed—as indeed any community of French women would be sure to be, however remote their habitation—and if the Orders which adorned the coats of the gentlemen were not invariably of the first or second class, they did not on that account make a less brave show. To the uninitiated eye one ribbon or star is very much like another.

Barrington, while scrutinising with pleased surprise so refined and civilised a gathering, was a little disappointed at failing to discover Mademoiselle de Mersac among the guests. He watched the dancers from the beginning to the end of a waltz; he sauntered through the ball-room, the card-room beyond it, and out on to the verandah, lit by hanging Moorish lamps of coloured glass; but nowhere could he discover the graceful, majestic figure of which he was in search. Léon offered to introduce him to a partner, and in common courtesy he could not decline; but as soon as he had walked through a set of

Lancers he returned to the doorway, and resumed his patient watch. The only entry he witnessed for his pains was that of M. de Saint-Luc, who lounged in very late, and surveyed the assemblage with a look of anxiety gradually deepening into intense annoyance and disgust, which caused the other disappointed watcher to chuckle in his corner.

Madame de Trémonville advanced to meet her guest with marked cordiality. In him she recognised one of the most prominent men of the epoch. Algiers generally knew little of M. de Saint-Luc, except that he had dissipated a large fortune by riotous living; but Madame de Trémonville was not as those barbarians. She knew her Paris; and was proud to welcome the man whom Imperialism had delighted to honour. Thanks to her sedulous study of certain Parisian journals, as well as to sundry private sources of information, she could have given him a tolerably accurate account of all his escapades in chronological order. Some years back, being at Longchamps, she had seen him leaning on the carriage-door of one of the famous ladies who frequented the Emperor's Court. The great race of the day had just been lost and won, and

the crowd was beginning to disperse. A bystander, nudging his companion, had said, 'Do you see that man? That is the Vicomte de Saint-Luc, who has just lost a hundred thousand francs—there is one who ruins himself gaily'—and Madame de Trémonville, overhearing the remark, had watched the imperturbable loser with increased interest, had seen him slowly make his way through the lines of carriages, bowing to one lady, shaking hands with another, and exchanging a few words with a third, till he reached the equipage of a notorious leader of the *demi-monde*, into which he had stepped and had been driven away with the eyes of all Paris upon him. Madame de Trémonville, witnessing this little scene, had felt a momentary thrill of noble enthusiasm. 'That is my ideal of a man!' she had exclaimed. So strange are the masculine ideals which some ladies have come to set up for themselves in the days in which we live. She donned her most winning smile, therefore, as she held out a tiny white-gloved hand to this hero, and thanked him for honouring her poor soirée with his presence.

'You will not find our little society amusing, monsieur,' she said, deprecatingly; 'but what can

you expect? With the best will in the world, it is impossible to transplant the Tuileries to Africa.'

Saint-Luc expressed contented acquiescence in this indisputable geographical fact, and took an early opportunity of escaping from his amiable hostess. He leant against the wall, and contemplated the company with a gloomy disapproval for which their provincialism was in no way responsible. There was M. de Trémonville, elderly, smooth-shaven, and dapper, rubbing his hands and beaming through his spectacles—the incarnation of a bureaucrat. (His real name was Bonjean; but, following the example of many others of the Emperor's servants, he had tacked the name of his native place on to his own plebeian patronymic, and now signed himself Bonjean de Trémonville, when he did not forget the Bonjean altogether. 'After all,' as Madame de Vaublanc was wont to say, in her good-natured way, 'the man must have been born somewhere, and why not at Trémonville—if there be such a place? Let us at least be thankful that he did not first see the light at Condé or Montmorency.') Then there was Madame Waranieff, a fat Russian lady, who was at Algiers

for her health, with her two fuzzy-haired marriageable daughters on either side of her; there was little M. de Fontvieille, with his nose in the air, conversing with Monseigneur the Archbishop, who had condescended to show himself for a few minutes at the house of so devout a member of his flock as Madame de Trémonville; there were the Sous-Gouverneur, the Préfet, the Sous-Préfet, the Mayor, half-a-dozen generals, and their wives, their daughters, their aides-de-camp, and their secretaries.

'*Parbleu!* they are *all* here,' growled Saint-Luc under his breath—" all except the one person whom I came to meet.'

But before the words had well escaped his lips he heard the voice of his hostess behind him welcoming some new-comer in her most honeyed accents. 'Ah, dear madame, is it possible that my poor little dance can have induced you to break through your rule of going to bed at half-past nine? It is too great an honour that you do me—really too great an honour!' And turning round to see who this distinguished guest might be, he became aware of Madame de Vaublanc's sour visage, above which, serene and beautiful, towered the head and shoulders of

Mademoiselle de Mersac. At this sight M. de Saint-Luc's features, which had hitherto worn an expression of the deepest dejection, became suddenly cheerful and animated. He made a hurried move in the direction of the doorway; but here his progress was interrupted by Madame de Vaublanc, who was eagerly explaining to her hostess that she was not there for her own pleasure.

'I never go to balls, not even to those given by my most intimate friends, much less—that is, I really never enter a ball-room. It was Mademoiselle de Mersac who persuaded me—she had no chaperon, and I did not wish her to be deprived of a little amusement—she does not have too much, poor child!—otherwise——'

'Then we are doubly indebted to mademoiselle,' returned Madame de Trémonville, sweetly. 'It was already very amiable of her to join a party of which she will be the chief ornament; but since she has brought you too with her, madame, I have no more fear as to the success of my evening.'

'Oh, madame, your compliment is intended to be ironical, no doubt; ugly old women are no attraction in any *salon*.'

'Kindness and courtesy, madame, are attractive in persons of all ages.'

Saint-Luc waited patiently till these amenities should be exhausted, and Madame de Vaublanc should see fit to leave the gangway free. Meanwhile Mr. Barrington, being less scrupulous, had pushed his way past the old lady, with a brief 'Pardon, madame;' and having shaken hands with Jeanne, who received him cordially, was writing his name upon her card. He wrote it more than once, as Saint-Luc observed with jealous surprise. What could there be in this self-satisfied Englishman to make Jeanne, who treated all men alike with the same *hauteur*, unbend towards him as towards an old friend? Was it because he was a Protestant, a foreigner, a man whom she could never be asked to marry, that she allowed him to take her ball-card from her hand, and only laughed when he held out her fan at arm's length and pretended to criticise the painting upon it with an artist's eye? Saint-Luc would fain have believed so; but there was a look of frank admiration in Mr. Barrington's blue eyes which he could not but perceive, and which caused him a good deal of uneasiness. At length Madame de Vaublanc moved on into the

room, and then his opportunity came. He had already bowed to Jeanne from afar, and had received a cold acknowledgment of his salute. He now stepped to her side as she swept past him. 'Mademoiselle will accord me a dance, I hope?' he said, humbly.

She stopped at once, and drawing out her card, answered with that chilly politeness which always froze poor Saint-Luc's pretty speeches before they were uttered, 'With pleasure, monsieur; which dance shall it be?'

He named a waltz half-way down the programme, and, with a slight bend of her head, she had left him before he had found courage enough to ask for a second one. He fell back, almost inclined to laugh at his own timidity. The truth is that the Vicomte de Saint-Luc, who had led cotillons in the presence of royalty, who had danced with princesses, and whose audacity in pushing his advances towards any lady whom he might chance to honour with his preference was a matter of notoriety, was as diffident as any schoolboy in the presence of the girl whom he loved.

'I am an imbecile—a veritable imbecile,' he murmured impatiently, as he lounged up to do his duty to the lady of the house.

With her, at all events, he was quite at ease. She belonged to a species with whose habits and tastes he was thoroughly conversant; and he managed, without any effort, to dance with her and take his fair share of the conversation, while, at the same time, his whole attention was fixed upon Jeanne, not one of whose movements escaped him. Many other eyes besides his were turned in the same direction. Mademoiselle de Mersac did not often appear in Algerian ballrooms; but when she did honour them by her presence she never failed to excite more admiration than anyone else in the room. Her beauty was of that superb kind which refuses to be ignored; it eclipsed the mere prettiness of other women as the moon outshines the stars, and extorted an unwilling tribute even from those who would gladly have depreciated it—for unfortunately the people who had been, or imagined themselves to have been, slighted by the imperious Jeanne formed no inconsiderable portion of any society in which she was likely to show herself. This evening her praises were sung with more cordiality than usual, for she was in an exceptionally gracious mood, and, contrary to her custom, had engaged herself for every dance. She refused

no partner till her card was full; she waltzed impartially with Mr. Barrington, with M. de Choisy, the Governor-General's aide-de-camp, with little Martin, a sub-lieutenant in a line regiment, who was only admitted into Society because his uncle was a bishop—and with a dozen others. She wore a dress of pale primrose silk (it was her habit to affect costumes somewhat richer than those generally adopted by unmarried ladies), and had steel ornaments on her neck, ears, and hair, which flashed with every turn of her graceful head. She was incontestably the most striking figure in the room.

This did not please Madame de Trémonville, who had no liking for the part of second fiddle, and who, previous to the arrival of this magnificent rival, had flattered herself that she had nothing to fear from comparison with any of her guests. 'Do you admire gigantic women?' she whispered to Saint-Luc. 'For my part, I think excessive size is as much a defect in us as it is a beauty in you.'

Saint-Luc, who stood six feet two in his socks, answered mechanically that he had no eye for proportions, but that those of madame were, without doubt, the standard by which the whole sex

should be judged; and received a playful tap on the shoulder from his partner's fan, in acknowledgment of this novel and delicate compliment. Madame de Trémonville's green velvet and Brussels lace, her exquisite complexion, and her wondrous coiffure were altogether thrown away upon him. He had not even noticed the diamonds which encircled her throat and sparkled amid her golden locks.

'All paste,' sneered Madame de Vaublanc, scrutinising these jewels from the corner where she had ensconced herself beside a congenial friend—'bought in the Palais Royal for a few hundred francs, you may be sure. Is it likely that that poor man would accept a small employment in Algeria if he could afford to give his wife such diamonds as those? Absurd!'

'Perhaps he did not buy them,' suggested the other amiable matron; 'perhaps they were a *present.* It is said that M. de Trémonville does not object to his wife's receiving occasional marks of esteem from her friends. They were talking of her the other night at the Palace—and between ourselves——' Here the good lady's voice is lowered to so confidential a pitch that we can't quite catch what she says. Very likely we

don't lose much. Communications of a somewhat similar nature are to be heard every night in all countries and in all classes of society. What is an old woman without daughters to do at a ball, except to take away the character of the young ones? Madame de Trémonville, whose conduct, it must be allowed, had more than once exhibited a target for the arrows of scandal to be aimed at, knew very well that ladies of Madame de Vaublanc's calibre could do her very little real injury; it amused her to know that they were on her track, and she liked to lead them on, and double, and baffle them when she was in the humour. Partly with this laudable object in view, and partly for her own gratification, she made a dead set at Saint-Luc during the early part of the evening, dismissing her other partners to dance with him again and again, till, seeing a large figure 9 hung out in front of the orchestra, he quitted her side rather abruptly.

'At last!' he muttered, as he made his way through the crowd to a small boudoir which he had seen Jeanne enter with Barrington at the end of the last dance. He found her seated on a low divan, the Englishman sprawling at her side, and presented himself with a bow. She glanced up at

him enquiringly, then down at her card, and rising immediately placed her hand within the arm which he offered her; and so they re-entered the ball-room.

'You have danced a great deal this evening, mademoiselle,' said Saint-Luc, with that strange difficulty in opening the conversation which he had never experienced in his intercourse with any woman except Jeanne.

'Yes; a good deal.'

'More than usual, I think.'

'Yes; rather more than usual.'

'I fancied you did not care much for balls.'

'*C'est selon.*'

'I suppose you mean that it depends upon your partners,' said Saint-Luc, with a tinge of annoyance in his voice. Her manner was disagreeable enough to justify some resentment; but it was more with himself than with her that he was vexed; for he felt that, somehow or other, he was not showing to advantage.

'Naturally,' she answered.

'Is that Mr. Barrington a good dancer?'

'Mr. Barrington? Yes, he dances well.'

'He must differ then from the rest of his nation. Without vanity, I will venture to assert

that you will find ten good dancers in France for one in England.'

'Really?'

'Yes. There are exceptions, of course; but, as a rule, Englishmen are not made for society. They always seem to me to require the open air. Out of doors they have a certain rough good humour, which excuses a good deal of *gaucherie*; but put them in a *salon*, and they become insupportable.'

'You have been in England, monsieur?'

'No; but I have met a great many Englishmen. Perhaps I am prejudiced, but frankly I do not like them. After all, the French and English are hereditary enemies.'

'My mother was an Englishwoman; and, for my own part, I have always been proud of being half English,' said Jeanne.

After that Saint-Luc thought he would change the subject.

'Is it an impertinence, mademoiselle,' he said, 'to congratulate you upon your charming toilette? I have seen nothing like it since I left Paris.'

A very slight bend of the head, combined with a supercilious droop of the eyelids and an upward curve of the lips, seemed to imply, as plainly as

politeness would permit, that Mademoiselle de Mersac *did* consider the remark an impertinence.

Saint-Luc felt this to be rather hard; it was so utterly at variance with all his experience that any lady should object to hear her dress praised. He was completely silenced, and bit his moustache moodily. It was Jeanne who spoke next.

'Shall we not dance?' she said; 'the waltz is half over.'

It really seemed the only thing to be done. In this particular, at all events, Saint-Luc felt that he could hardly give offence. His Parisian apprenticeship had lasted so long that he knew himself to be a complete master of the art of waltzing; and as he piloted his partner smoothly and swiftly through the throng, never losing time, and never so much as brushing against another couple, he took some comfort from the thought that though it appeared impossible for him to open his mouth in Jeanne's presence without angering her, she could not, at least, complain of him as a partner.

When the dance was at an end, he got a little disdainful compliment for his pains.

'You have a right to criticise the dancing of others, Monsieur de Saint-Luc,' said Jeanne; 'your own is perfect.' If she had added, 'You are fit

for nothing better than dancing,' she could not have conveyed her meaning more clearly to the mind of her hearer.

The poor Vicomte was as much puzzled as he was hurt. He could not in the least understand the girl, nor what she was driving at. He would have liked to ask her point-blank what he had done to be so cruelly snubbed, and why she should regard a man who had never willingly offended her with such determined aversion. Had he done so, he would have risen several degrees in her estimation, and would probably have got an honest answer into the bargain; but he thought that conventionality debarred him from so straightforward a course—and, after a minute's consideration, he could find no better rejoinder than a rather aggrieved one to the effect that he did not care about dancing, and would not have been where he was that night, had he not been told that he would be rewarded by meeting Mademoiselle de Mersac.

'You do not like dancing?' said Jeanne, incredulously, passing by his reference to herself. 'I thought you were such a famous leader of cotillons. *À propos*, who leads the cotillon this evening?'

'I suppose you know that I am to do it,' answered Saint-Luc, with a little vexed laugh. 'I should have preferred to refuse; but what could I do when that woman insisted? She is one of those people who are no more disturbed by a refusal than a rhinoceros by a discharge of small shot.'

'If you do not like her, why do you dance so much with her?' asked Jeanne, gravely. 'You have scarcely left her side the whole evening, and now you compare her to a rhinoceros. I wonder what flattering likeness you will discover for me when my back is turned.'

Saint-Luc was very patient, and very much in love; but this unremitting hostility was becoming too much even for him. 'When you know me better, mademoiselle,' he said, coldly, 'you will find that I do not speak ill of my friends. As for Madame de Trémonville, she is no friend of mine. Here comes your partner for the next dance. I suppose I must not hope to be honoured by another.'

Mademoiselle de Mersac regretted that she was engaged for the remainder of the evening; and so, with a slight inclination of her head, passed back into the ball-room on the arm of the happy M. Martin, leaving Saint-Luc to meditate

over the progress of his suit. He shrugged his shoulders in contemptuous wonder at his own infatuation as he made his way into the card-room. where three old gentlemen were playing whist with dummy; and there he remained, not caring to dance again, till the time came for him to fulfil his cotillon duties.

The cotillon, without which no French ball is complete, has failed to take root as an institution in England, probably because it has never been rightly understood in this country, where, indeed, it is usually considered to be a sort of organised romp, of which the principal features are the stationing of a lady in the middle of the floor with a looking-glass in her hand, the throwing of a ball to be scrambled for by a line of male competitors, and the affixing of a set of harness, adorned with jingling-bells, to the shoulders of four unhappy and self-conscious men, who are then driven round the room, feebly endeavouring to mitigate the absurdity of their position by an agonised imitation of the pawing and prancing of a spirited team. What Madame de Trémonville understood by a cotillon was something infinitely more intricate, more artistic, and more decorous than this. With its

complicated figures, its crossings of hands, its frequent changes of partners, its involutions and evolutions, and its stately rhythmic measures which melted into waltzes, it was a performance which required some study and management, and no one was expected to take part in it who was not familiar with its more ordinary figures, and who was not quick at catching up the new ones which were constantly being introduced into it. The inevitable looking-glass, the bouquets, and the badges were not omitted from the programme; but they were by no means its chief feature, nor did they lead to anything in the semblance of a romp. Not that Madame de Trémonville had any objection to the latter method of passing the time when her more intimate friends were gathered about her—on the contrary, she had a strong predilection for it, derived like her Ultramontanism, her penchant for *bric-à-brac*, and many other incongruous tastes, from quarters whence she obtained her notion of the prevailing fashion—but, in mixed society, she judged it best to earn a character for elegance rather than eccentricity.

'Are you not ashamed of yourself?' she cried, seeking out Saint-Luc in the card-room, towards two o'clock in the morning, and rousing him

by her thin falsetto voice from the reverie in which he had been plunged. 'Does one go to balls to look on at a game of whist?'

'What pleasure could it have given me to remain in the ball-room and see you dancing with others?' returned Saint-Luc, in his politely perfunctory manner.

'Ah, bah! you were lazy. I would have danced with you if you had taken the trouble to ask me. In your absence, I have been amusing myself with your friend the little marquis, whom I found much improved by his travels. He will develope himself. I have great hopes of him. But now I am going to make you work, whether you will or no. Here is the list of our figures for the cotillon. With which would you advise me to begin?'

Saint-Luc took the strip of paper which she handed to him, and having perused it, briefly delivered his opinion as to one or two points in the programme; Madame de Trémonville listening to him with as much reverence as a newly-joined subaltern displays in listening to his colonel. In truth, Saint-Luc had long ago reached the highest grades in that service of fashionable society of which the lady was but a hanger-on and exiled admirer.

Entering the ball-room presently, laden with the paraphernalia of flowers, ribbons, hoops, and so forth, necessary for the task set before him, he was surprised to see Jeanne seated upon one of the chairs which had been ranged round the room for the convenience of the dancers. Knowing how seldom she lingered at any entertainment after midnight, he had not counted upon seeing her again that evening, and perhaps the sight of her might have pleased as well as surprised him if the tenant of the chair next to hers had not been Mr. Barrington. As it was, he frowned uneasily. Of Barrington in the character of a possible husband for Jeanne he had no fear; difference of nation, religion, and language were sufficient guarantees against the chance of such a match being proposed; but he was jealous, furiously jealous, of the man who, without any apparent effort, had managed to make himself acceptable to Mademoiselle de Mersac during an entire evening, and who was even now bending over her with a familiarity which he—Saint-Luc—would never have dared to assume. Had he been a vain man he would have been mortified at the ease with which another had succeeded where he had so lamentably failed; but vain he

was not—only envious and jealous, as was but natural under the circumstances.

Saint-Luc had reduced the leading of a cotillon to a science. He could direct its most intricate movements, and at the same time reserve a large portion of his attention for some other subject. He was able, therefore, to acquit himself to the entire satisfaction of his hostess, while watching with increasing pain and wonder the progress of the sudden intimacy which had sprung up between Jeanne and the Englishman. Observing the unconscious couple thus closely, he soon became aware of a phenomenon for which he was at first at a loss to account; namely, that, whereas Barrington was evidently in the best of spirits, and grew more talkative and merry with each successive figure, Jeanne, on the contrary, was as evidently dissatisfied, and became gradually graver and more pre-occupied, till at last she ceased to speak to or notice her partner at all. It was not till the cotillon was three parts over that Saint-Luc discovered the clue to this change of mood. A most decided frown upon Jeanne's straight brows and an impatient tap of her foot enlightened him. He followed the direction of her glance, and was just in time to catch the con-

clusion of a little scene which the rest of the company had been watching with more or less of satirical interest. Exactly in the centre of the room, before the eyes of all Algiers, Madame de Trémonville, having selected a flower from a bouquet which she held in her hand, was presenting it to Léon, who, with the sublime fatuity of which only a very young Frenchman can be capable, raised it to his lips before fixing it into his button-hole. The figure which had just come to an end was that in which gentlemen are permitted to select their partners by the presentation of a bouquet, and it was in the above-mentioned way that the mistress of the house chose to manifest her recognition of the compliment paid her by the young marquis. Saint-Luc recollected immediately that Madame de Trémonville had invariably singled out Léon when she had been called upon to choose a partner, and the reason of Jeanne's displeasure became obvious to him. In her place he would have been disposed rather to laugh than to be angry; but, regarding Jeanne as he did with a reverential awe, as a being of infinitely greater purity and nobility than himself, he understood that, in her eyes, any semblance of flirtation with a married woman

must be a heinous crime, and more with a view to saving her annoyance than to rescuing his young friend from any possible peril, he resolved to take an early opportunity of speaking a few words of friendly caution to Léon. His own bouquet, which he ought by rights to have presented to some lady, lay unheeded on the floor at his side. He had not taken the trouble to offer it to anyone, seeing that the only person in the room whose good-will he valued in the least had shown him in the most unmistakable manner that his attentions were unwelcome.

But now humility was unexpectedly rewarded. For, the order of the dance being changed, and it being the turn of the ladies to choose the partners most agreeable to them, who should come gravely up to the diffident Vicomte, with a little badge of red ribbon outheld between her finger and thumb, but Mademoiselle de Mersac?

Saint-Luc started, half-delighted, half-doubtful. For a second he thought the stately young lady who stood before him must have made some mistake ; but no—there was the knot of red ribbon within an inch of his nose, proffered a trifle disdainfully, it is true, yet distinctly intended for him. He pinned it on his coat, too much be-

wildered to find any words, and mechanically placed his arm round Jeanne's slender waist. But before he had taken half a turn round the room, his partner let him know that she wished to stop. They were then exactly opposite the door.

'I am going away,' she said in that quiet, commanding tone, as of a superior to an inferior, which she always used in addressing Saint-Luc. 'If they can spare you for a few minutes, I should be much obliged if you would take me out to get my wraps.'

'They *must* spare me,' he answered joyfully, leading her out into the dim hall, where Madame de Vaublanc, with a wonderful peaked hood on her head and a multiplicity of cloaks and mufflers about her small person, was awaiting her charge. 'If they want me, they must do without me. I should be perfectly willing to send them all to purgatory for the chance of doing you the smallest service.'

'That will not be necessary,' answered Jeanne, with a slight smile ; but it happens that I have to ask you to do me a small service—in fact, I brought you out here for that purpose.'

'If it be in my power to do what you wish,

mademoiselle, you may consider it an accomplished fact.'

'It is certainly in your power,' she said, and paused for a moment. Then she resumed, rather hurriedly—'You have great influence over my brother—more, I think, than I have, in some things. I want you to use it to keep him away from Madame de Trémonville. You will understand what I mean. You saw what took place to-night; and Léon is a young man; and—and I suppose all young men are the same. And he will listen to you, though I doubt whether he would listen to me. I would not ask you to do me this favour,' she concluded, 'if it were likely to give you any trouble or inconvenience; but, so far as I can see, it will do neither. After all, you can scarcely have any *interest* in bringing my brother and Madame de Trémonville together.'

For an instant the colour rose to Saint-Luc's pale cheeks, and his eyes flashed; but he had perfect self-control, and it was without any show of anger, though more coldly than usual, that he answered, 'I do not know from whence you have derived your opinion of me, mademoiselle; but it does not appear to be a high one. For the rest, you are quite right—I am not worth much; yet

I am capable occasionally of acting from other motives than those of self-interest; and as to the subject of which you speak, I had already intended to take the liberty of saying a few words to your brother about it—so that you need not feel annoyed by the thought that you are under any obligation to me—however small—in the matter.'

And as Jeanne looked at him a little doubtfully, he added, 'Some day, mademoiselle, you will perhaps acknowledge that, whatever my faults may be, I am, at least, not untrue to my friends.'

Jeanne, not being as yet convinced of the truth of this statement, and finding nothing to say in answer to it, merely bowed, and turned to follow Madame de Vaublanc, whom M. de Trémonville was now helping into her carriage. But when she had taken a few steps, she wheeled round, and marching back to Saint-Luc, said abruptly—

'It is possible that I have been unjust to you, monsieur; if so, I am sorry for it. And I think I treated you rather rudely earlier in the evening; I am very sorry for that also, and I beg your pardon. Now you had better return to the ball-room, or they will wonder what has become of you. Good-night.'

The apology was not a very graceful one, nor was it delivered by any means in a contrite tone; but, such as it was, Saint-Luc gladly accepted it, and went back to conclude his duties with a somewhat lighter heart. As for Jeanne, she left the house telling herself that she neither liked the man nor trusted him, but that, upon the whole, she had perhaps been wrong in letting him see so plainly what her feelings with regard to him were. She had, therefore, offered him her excuses—and what more could be expected of her?

At the door she met Barrington, who came up, hat in hand, and said eagerly, 'You won't forget your promise, will you?'

'My promise?' she returned interrogatively. 'Oh, you mean about the picture. No, I will not forget, and if the Duchess has no objection, I shall be happy to appear in it. When will you come and make your arrangements? To-morrow? Very well; then we will expect you at breakfast-time—twelve o'clock. Good-night.'

She spoke indifferently enough, being at the moment occupied with reflections in which the Englishman and his artistic tastes had no share, but her voice had a perceptibly more friendly ring than that in which she had addressed Saint-Luc;

and Barrington, as he lit his cigar, and strolled down towards the town, through scented orange-groves, and under the shade of olives and carob-trees, grey and ghostly in the starlight, laughed triumphantly to himself. 'I was sure I should get her to sit to me,' he thought. 'Really, if people only knew it, the best way to gain anything is to ask for it. Most men don't understand that, and lose what they want because they wait for it to be offered to them. Heavens! what a splendid creature she is, and how mad that poor devil of a Frenchman is about her. I doubt whether *his* asking for what he wants would be of much use; yet he would have a better chance if he came straight to the point with her, instead of throwing himself down at her feet to be trampled upon. I could give him a hint or two, if I wanted him to succeed—only I don't.'

CHAPTER VII.

BARRINGTON STUDIES THE PICTURESQUE.

'Colour,' said Barrington sententiously, leaning back in his rocking-chair and pointing with the end of his cigarette to the liquid blue sky above him with lazy approbation—'colour is one of the chief delights of existence. It is wonderful how few people realise that truth. And yet all human beings are more or less under the influence of colour, and are made happy by the sight of it, or dispirited by its absence, as they would know if they took the pains to analyse their sensations. The man who has the room next to mine at the Hôtel d'Orient is dying of consumption; his doctor has sent him here, without a single relation or friend, to get well—which he has about as much chance of doing as I have of becoming Pope; and he doesn't speak more than a few words of French, and he doesn't like foreign cooking, and he says the fleas bite him, and he wishes to goodness he

was back in England. One can't help taking an interest in one's next door neighbour—though I must say I wish he didn't cough so much at nights; but that is not his fault, poor beggar!—so I generally look in after breakfast and try to cheer him up a little. Well, this morning when I went to see him as usual, I found him sitting at the open window, twirling a bunch of violets between his finger and thumb, and whistling as merrily as a cricket. I asked him what made him so cheerful and he said he really didn't know, unless it was that there was a fine warm sun to-day. Stuff! Take the man's violets away from him, and plant him in his arm-chair in the middle of the Sahara, and do you suppose he would whistle? Not he! I knew, though he didn't, that it was the sight of the cobalt sea and the far-away purple hills, and the Moors in the street below, and the children selling flowers, and of a hundred subtle effects produced by refraction, that was making him happy; and I declare, when I looked at him, I wished with all my heart that his relations would come out here to him, and that he would not live to return to England. One feels nearer Heaven in such a climate as this; and, for my part, I never can understand how it is that there is as

much crime in the South of Europe as in the North. Hang it all! you have no *right* to be wicked in a country where Nature is so kind to you. Thanks; I will take just one drop of that green Chartreuse, and then, if you will allow me, I will go and find your sister, and set to work.'

Mr. Barrington was sitting in the verandah at the Campagne de Mersac. Through the open windows of the dining-room at his back might have been seen a deserted breakfast-table, whose snowy damask, heaped-up fruit, half-empty decanters, and profusion of flowers formed a combination of colour which he had already duly appreciated while rendering justice to the merits of his friends' cook. At his side was a small table, on which stood a silver Moorish coffee-pot, two cups, and a liqueur-decanter, and beyond it, Léon, clad in a complete suit of white duck, reclined in an easy chair, puffing at his cigarette with a somewhat bewildered expression of countenance, having had some difficulty in following the foreign idiom in which the above harangue had been couched.

'One has no right to be wicked anywhere,' he observed, with undeniable justice, in reply to the speaker's last words.

'Of course not; but don't you see what a

difference surroundings ought to make? A man who at the end of his day's work finds himself in a dismal, filthy street, with the rain chilling him to the bones, and no object that his eyes can rest upon but what is hideous and melancholy, naturally betakes himself to the first place where he can get liquor enough to make him forget his misery—after which he goes home, and, by way of protest against the hopelessness of his existence, knocks his wife down and kicks her about the head.'

'I do not think we do that in Algeria,' said Léon; 'but there are often cases of stabbing, especially among the Spaniards, whose knives are always ready. And as to the climate, you cannot judge of its effects till you have spent a summer here, and have felt the influence of a three days' sirocco upon your nerves. I can assure you that after twenty-four hours of it, you would be capable of taking your own mother by the hair if she irritated you; and, as a fact, there is far more violence at such times than ordinarily.'

'Indeed? So it all works round to much the same thing in the end; and there is compensation in everyone's lot—or at least, a grievance, which is still pleasanter. All the same, I don't think I

should mind living in Algeria ; in fact, I think I should very much like it, and I am not sure that I wouldn't do it if I were a free man, and hadn't my own poor acres to look after in England. I wonder now whether one could make a small farm here pay its way ; it would be an excuse for running over for a few months every year.'

Léon shook his head. 'You would be robbed,' he said. 'Even if you lived upon your farm, it is not likely that you would make money by it, and if you were absent it is certain that you would lose a great deal. Besides, the life would not suit you, even for a few months. For me it is different. I have been accustomed to it from a child, and I have no dislike either to the heat or the loneliness of the summer. Some day I will take you out to the little farm where I breed my horses, beyond Koléah, and we will get up a boar-hunt to amuse you. You will be pleased with it at this season of the year, for it stands high, overlooking the Metidja plain and facing the Atlas mountains, and the air is strong and fresh, and though there is no cultivation just in the neighbourhood, you can see the corn-fields and orange-groves beneath you, and the white houses of Blidah far away under the opposite

hills; but in summer it is melancholy enough. Then the whole country is parched and burnt brown; there is generally a mist over the mountains, and most people find the silence oppressive. Nevertheless old Pierre Cauvin and I generally spend three weeks or so there in August, and sometimes Jeanne comes with us, and then we are as happy as children. Early every morning, and again at sunset, we gallop over the country for miles, and the young horses follow us in a troop, squealing and kicking up their heels, and we feel as if the whole world belonged to us. Ah, that is the life! I like the world and society and amusement, but I don't think I ever enjoy myself so well as when I am quite free, and away from civilisation. I suppose living so much among the Arabs has made me a little of a savage at heart. Jeanne, Mr. Barrington says he would like to buy a farm in Algeria, and I tell him he would lose his money if he did, and would hate the country and the climate into the bargain. It is not everyone who can transform himself into a Bedouin like you and me, *ma sœur*.'

Léon had spoken in his own language, but Jeanne, who now showed herself at the window, with Turco at her side, turned to Barrington with

a bright smile and addressed him in English, which she spoke quite correctly, but with just enough of foreign accent to lend it a charm not its own.

'You really think of buying land here?' she said. 'How delightful that would be!'

Barrington was so much pleased and flattered, that if Léon had offered to sell him a few hundred acres off-hand, he would very likely have consented to the bargain then and there; but before he had time to reply, Jeanne broke into a laugh at the absurdity of her own notion. 'Of course you were not speaking seriously,' she said. 'Algiers is pleasant enough in the winter time, and when you have a comfortable hotel to lodge in; but to live in one of our rough farmhouses—that is another thing! I think you would not remain with us long. Now, when will you begin your picture?'

'Whenever you are ready,' answered Barrington. 'I thought, if you did not mind taking up your position in that chair at the end of the verandah, I might station myself in the garden below, so as to get in the marabout, which is really the most characteristic part of the house.'

It was the house that this artful schemer had

requested permission to delineate. He represented himself as an enthusiastic admirer of Moorish architecture, and only suggested as an innocent afterthought that a portrait of Mademoiselle de Mersac, seated on the balcony, would add life to his picture. He went off in search of his materials, and, on his return, found that he was likely to have a *tête-à-tête* interview with his fair model, Léon having slipped away to look after his farm duties.

'So much the better; two is company, three is none,' he thought, as he set up his easel within a few feet of the carved balustrade beside which Jeanne was sitting in a low chair, Turco resting his great head on her knee, and blinking lazily from his shady position at the painter out in the sunshine.

'Surely you are placing yourself too close,' Jeanne said, turning to look down upon him; 'you will only be able to take a very small corner of the house from where you are sitting.'

'It is only a very small corner that I want,' replied Barrington, without hesitation. 'As far as general effect goes, these Moorish buildings are not striking; their beauty lies in their carved woodwork and arabesques and marble pillars,

and, and, and—in detail, in short. If I were a dozen yards away, I couldn't possibly do justice to the detail—don't you see.'

'Could you not? I am very glad, at all events, that you are obliged to approach so near, for now we can talk,' said Jeanne, unsuspectingly. 'I am anxious to hear what you think of our little colonial society. Did you enjoy yourself last night?'

'Immensely,' answered Barrington with a strong emphasis on the word. 'I don't know when I have enjoyed a ball so much. Would you mind turning round a little, so that I may get your face quite in profile? I shall have to take one or two sketches before I begin the picture itself. Thank you very much. How could I do otherwise than enjoy myself when—when everybody was so kind and hospitable? And you—were you tolerably well amused?'

'Oh, yes,' answered Jeanne, a slight cloud coming over her face, 'it was very pleasant—at least for part of the evening. I got a little tired of it towards the end; but I am not very fond of balls.'

'I am afraid you must have repented of your kindness in giving me the cotillon,' said Barring-

ton, executing a few rapid strokes, and surveying the result with his head thrown back. 'I am not a first-rate waltzer, I know.'

'First-rate, no!' answered Jeanne, candidly; 'but you dance very well—remarkably well, indeed, for an Englishman. Besides, I am not exacting.'

'I suppose we English *are* a clumsy people,' remarked Barrington, with just a tinge of disappointment in his tone—for indeed he was considered an excellent dancer both in his own county and in London—'our education does not include a great many useful little accomplishments. As for me, I have perhaps had rather more advantages than other fellows—not that I am conceited about it, or anything of that kind, you know—still I did learn to dance at Vienna.'

'Did you?' said Jeanne, stroking Turco's head and gazing absently out to sea. 'The Austrians are the best waltzers in the world, are they not?'

She was evidently so little interested in the subject that Barrington did not think it worth while to reply to her last question, and returned to his sketch with an uncomfortable impression of having vaunted himself without effect.

There was a silence of nearly five minutes,

which Jeanne broke at last by taking up the conversation exactly where she had left it.

'You do not care to be thought a good dancer, do you?' she asked.

'I? Oh, I don't know—yes, I think I do. One always likes to do everything as well as one can.'

'But dancing is such an effeminate thing! For women it is very well, but men have so many better ways of distinguishing themselves. I like Englishmen, because they are more manly in their amusements than Frenchmen. A man ought to be a man; and that is why I always tell Léon to imitate the English in everything except—except in a few small particulars. He talks a great deal about your riding and shooting, and says you are *de première force* in everything of that kind.'

'Oh dear no! I don't think I am really what you could call good at anything. I can shoot pretty fairly some days, but not by any means always; and shooting, I believe, is my chief accomplishment. You see an idle man is bound to take up all sorts of different pursuits, and it would be odd if he couldn't succeed in any of them. I am a Jack-of-all-trades and master of none, as we say in England. Your brother

thinks me a wonderful fellow because I can speak French and play the piano and paint a little; but your brother, I fancy, is rather inclined to magnify the talents of his friends. He is a little enthusiastic, isn't he?'

'Leon? Yes, a little: he is young,' answered Jeanne in a tone of kind toleration, as though she and youth had nothing in common.

'At his age,' resumed Barrington, with that sententiousness which some of his friends occasionally found rather trying, 'one receives impressions rather than forms judgments. A lad of twenty or twenty-one seldom sees far below the surface, and is very apt to make friends with associates who may do him incalculable harm before he finds them out.'

'You are not speaking of yourself, I suppose?'

'Well, no; I do not push modesty quite so far. But frankly, I do think that your brother is getting into a set here which is not likely to do him any good. I hope I don't offend you by saying so.'

'Not at all; on the contrary, you would do me a great kindness if you would tell me in what way you think he is in danger. He is his own master now,' said Jeanne with a half sigh; 'but I have

still more power with him, I believe, than anyone else.'

'Exactly. I knew that, or I should not have ventured to broach the subject. The fact is, that, if I were you, I should try to keep him away from that fellow, Saint-Luc.'

'You do not like M. de Saint-Luc?'

'No; I dislike him particularly. But it is not a question of liking or disliking. He might be the pleasantest fellow in existence, and yet a very bad companion for a lad just entering the world. He belongs to a class which I happen to know something of, and which includes a great many very agreeable and entertaining people; only unfortunately they have not got a vestige of a principle among them. The first time I saw M. de Saint-Luc, I knew at once what he was—a man who would do anything, except perhaps cheat at cards.'

'I don't think he means any harm to Leon,' said Jeanne, who had a dislike to speaking ill of the absent.

'Means!—well, possibly not; but example is more powerful than intention. Then there is Madame de Trémonville. From the little I saw of her, she is another person whom I should be

inclined to warn any young brother of mine against.'

'Why do you say that?' asked Jeanne sharply, wheeling round in her chair, and facing Mr. Barrington with an anxious look, which he saw, though he pretended to be still occupied with his work.

'I have no special reason,' he answered—'I am afraid I must trouble you to place yourself in the same position that you were in just now. Thank you very much. I have no particular reason for condemning Madame de Trémonville; but for all that you may take my word for it that she is not a safe friend for an impressionable young man. When you joined us, he was saying how he enjoyed life at his farm in the country; if I were you, I would induce him to go out there now for a change of air.'

'He would not do that,' answered Jeanne. 'And, besides, he has been so long away that we could not spare him again just at present. But it is kind of you to take an interest in him,' she added, after a pause, 'and I shall think over what you have said.'

She dismissed the subject as a queen dismisses an audience; and Barrington, amused though he

was by her unconscious imperiousness, was not bold enough to say any more. He worked on silently at the rough sketch which he had begun, indulging himself, from time to time, with a furtive study of the beautiful, composed face which showed no consciousness of his scrutiny. 'I wonder what her future will be,' he mused. 'Not an altogether happy one, I should hope; I doubt whether happiness would be becoming to her. Those great melancholy eyes and that calm sweet mouth were made to triumph over adversity, not to lose their meaning in commonplace domestic bliss. Imagine her married to a fat Frenchman, and the mother of three or four squalling brats with cropped heads—oh, odious thought! No; she must have some more exciting—more romantic history than that. I think I should prefer her to remain unmarried—perhaps have an unfortunate attachment in early life, so as to subdue her a little, and soften down that occasional hardness of manner which is her one defect. Then she must have her share of trouble—that, no doubt, will be provided by our young friend Léon—and gradually withdraw from the world, giving herself up more and more to good works. Of course her house will always be open to receive

an old friend, though—that I shall certainly require of her, and——'

At this juncture the subject of his day-dream interrupted him by remarking—

'It is very tiring to sit so long in the same attitude. Can you not draw the balcony for a few minutes, and allow me to move? Ah, here is M. de Fontvieille. *À la bonne heure!* Now I shall be obliged to get up and shake hands with him.'

Old M. de Fontvieille, who had just appeared round the corner of the house, came forward, holding in his hand the broad-leaved Panama hat which the exigencies of the climate compelled him to wear rather against the grain. In the town, or when paying visits of ceremony, he affected the tall, very tall black hat of a bygone period of fashion, and at all times and in all places the rest of his costume was a model of scrupulous neatness.

His erect and dapper little figure was evidently not unacquainted with artful appliances in the shape of stays and padding; his tightly-fitting grey trowsers were strapped under a tiny pair of boots, so highly polished that it was impossible to look at them, on a sunshiny day, without blink-

ing; and his grey moustache and imperial were carefully waxed.

As he bent over Jeanne's outstretched hand, he threw up at her one of those languishing glances which had done terrible execution in the days when the world was forty years younger. They were innocent enough now, those speaking looks from eyes which age had long since dimmed, and were meant to express nothing more than that respectful homage which M. de Fontvieille had never in his life failed to render to any member of the fair sex, whether old or young, plain or pretty. The old gentleman had retained the manner, as well as the costume, of a youth which had been prolonged beyond the limits of middle age, and ogled grandmothers and grandchildren with perfect impartiality.

'I have been paying my respects to Madame la Duchesse,' he said; 'and I have made her promise to come out into the garden shortly to enjoy this divine sunshine. She left me in the drawing-room, saying that she would put on her bonnet and return in two minutes. I waited for her half an hour, and then, as I was beginning to tire of my own company, I thought I might venture to step round and wish you good-morning.

So you are about to be immortalised, Jeanne? Will you do me the honour to present me to monsieur?'

Barrington rose and bowed, as Jeanne made the requested introduction, and M. de Fontvieille bent his grey head till it was almost in a line with his knees, and brushed the gravel with a backward sweep of his Panama hat.

'You are an amateur artist, monsieur?' said the elder gentleman. 'I envy you your talent: you are in a country which should be the paradise of artists; and you have a magnificent landscape before you. May I be permitted to glance at your canvas?'

'Certainly,' answered Barrington, standing back to allow the other to approach his easel; 'but it is not precisely the landscape that I propose to paint. As you see by the rough sketch before you, I am attempting nothing more ambitious than a *souvenir* of this exquisite old building; and mademoiselle has very kindly consented to let me have a likeness of herself in the foreground.'

'Ah, I perceive,' said the old gentleman, peering inquisitively at the outline through his double eye-glass—'a study of the Campagne and mademoiselle; or perhaps I ought rather to say, of

mademoiselle and the Campagne. Both charming subjects, monsieur, and I admire your taste in having accorded the largest portion of your space to the more deserving of the two.'

'Mademoiselle is in the foreground,' began Barrington, explanatorily.

'Naturally. It would have been impolite to place her anywhere else,' returned M. de Fontvieille, with a twinkle in his eye. 'Do you paint in oils or in water-colours, monsieur?'

'In oils.'

'Ah! and that requires many sittings, does it not?—a picture in oils.'

Barrington answered vaguely that it was impossible to fix in advance the time required for the completion of any picture; and then, to his relief, the Duchess joined the group, leaning upon her stick, and M. de Fontvieille desisted from his queries.

The two old people went away together presently, and began a steady, slow promenade up and down over the gravel walks, while Barrington returned to his work, and Jeanne to her reflections.

'And how does the *affaire* Saint-Luc progress?' enquired M. de Fontvieille, as soon as he and his old friend were out of earshot.

The Duchess made a grimace. 'As far as I can see, it does not progress at all,' she answered. 'You know how perverse Jeanne is; it is mere waste of time and temper to attempt to influence her. Happily M. de Saint-Luc is of a very patient disposition; and, moreover, he is desperately in love with the girl. I trust in time, and say nothing; but I wish the matter could be settled one way or the other. At my age, Time is an uncertain friend; I may have to part with him for ever before I am a year older, and then what is to become of Jeanne? Ah, the poor old Marquis! If he had not taken it into his head to marry an Englishwoman, how much trouble we might all have been spared!'

'Jeanne, for one, would have been spared the trouble of existence,' observed M. de Fontvieille. 'Her father's marriage may have been no blessing for her; but it has provided you and me, madame, with an interest for our old age. Does M. de Saint-Luc come here often?'

'No, not very often. He is ceremonious, and will not visit us without an invitation. Certainly he is invited tolerably frequently; but then, you understand, it is I who ask him, and he is not always well received.'

'It is a pity,' remarked M. de Fontvieille, meditatively, with a glance in the direction of the house, where Barrington and Jeanne were to be seen apparently engaged in animated conversation—'it is a pity that M. de Saint-Luc is not an artist.'

'Ah, bah!' returned the Duchess, following his look and his thought; 'there is no danger. Jeanne, if she is deficient in some good qualities, has at least that of common sense; and that Mr. Barrington (who, *par parenthèse*, is a much better informed and more agreeable person than most of his compatriots) is no longer young enough to make a fool of himself. Everybody knows that mixed marriages always end in misery. If, however, you have any fears,' she added with a short sardonic laugh, 'I will tell Jeanne that the Englishman is an excellent *parti*, and that I have a high opinion of him. That will dispose of him effectually.'

'He is rich, they say.'

'My dear monsieur, of what are you dreaming? If he had all the wealth of the Rothschilds, do you suppose that would make any difference? No, no! we have had enough of English marriages in the de Mersac family. But

I tell you there is no danger at all. Come, let us talk of something else. I am weary of vexing myself, night and day, with the question of Jeanne's future.'

'The future? My dear madame, we have reached an age—you and I—at which most mortals cease to have any control over future events, and retain very little over present ones. We have acted our part and said our say in this world, and must now stand aside to make room for a younger generation. All that we can do is to offer good advice—which we may be pretty sure will not be accepted. Did you act upon advice when you were young, madame? For my part, nothing short of coercion had any influence upon me; and Jeanne is not precisely a person to be coerced. Why, then, vex yourself? Jeanne will take her own way, and very likely it will not be a bad way. Only, if I were in your place, and if I were determined that she should marry M de Saint-Luc, I should seriously recommend that gentleman to develop a talent for drawing. But I see that the subject is displeasing to you; pardon me if I have been indiscreet in pursuing it.'

M. de Fontvieille stood still in the gravel path,

took off his hat, and bowed profoundly as he made this apology.

'Will you come now and see my sapphires?' he continued. 'They are good stones—that I know; but I want the benefit of your taste as to the best setting for them.'

M. de Fontvieille had for some years been the tenant of the neighbouring villa, which the Duchess had taken upon her first arrival at Algiers, and which she had occupied up to the time of the old Marquis's death. He had filled the house with curiosities and works of art of one kind and another, being a well-to-do old gentleman, and having some difficulty in disposing of the superfluity of his income; but his chief craze was his collection of precious stones. These, the possession of which was doubly dear to him by reason of many a well-remembered haggle and protracted bargain preceding their purchase, he kept in certain strong boxes fitted, for that purpose, with velvet-covered trays, and exhibited, with just pride, to appreciative friends.

'What? More gems!' cried the Duchess. 'You will ruin yourself, my friend; and, one of these fine mornings, your servant will murder you,

and run away with your treasures. I will see the sapphires, though : I am not too old to take delight in looking at pretty things.'

So the two old people disappeared from the garden; and were a considerable time absent; for, once the boxes were unlocked, neither of them could resist going through the entire collection. When they returned, the western sky was flooded with a glow of orange light, upon which tiny golden cloudlets floated; the flower-beds were barred with long black shadows from the cypresses, and the air was sharp with the chill which in southern latitudes invariably heralds the sunset. Jeanne had left her post in the verandah, and was standing beside the artist, who had already packed up his easel, paint-box, and other belongings.

'Mademoiselle is going to introduce me to her live stock,' said the latter.

'Oh, indeed,' answered the Duchess. 'Are you fond of animals, Mr. Barrington?'

'Devoted to them.'

'*Ma foi!* then I envy you your taste. If I could share it my life would be far pleasanter than it is; but unluckily for me, I have never had any love for menageries. That dog Turco is bad

enough : he keeps me in constant terror by his habit of bouncing out unexpectedly from behind doors, and oversetting the unwary; but he is an angel in comparison with the wild boar, or with Jeanne's jackal, whom we call Jérémie on account of his ceaseless lamentations. Do you know what it is, monsieur, to be kept awake, the whole night through, by the howling of a jackal? But of course you do not. If a jackal howled under your window, you would take a gun, in the course of five minutes, and go out and kill him. That is also what I should do if I were a man; but being only an old woman, and timid of fire-arms, I have to lie still, and listen to the senseless cries of that evil beast till I'm almost maddened, and——'

'I had no idea that you could hear him on your side of the house, madame,' interposed Jeanne, apologetically. 'If he disturbs you, we will send him away into the country.'

'Useless, dear child! His empty kennel would remain, and neither you nor Léon would allow it to stand long unoccupied. I prefer present known evils to future indefinite ones. Would you believe, monsieur, that we once had a hyæna chained in the backyard for three days? On the

fourth day he broke loose, and was found at night scratching at the graves in the churchyard. Imagine what a scandal! He was summarily put to death. As for that depraved Jérémie, I have become accustomed to him after a fashion; and how do I know what his successor might be? Very probably a porcupine, who would wander about the house, and who would be sure to take a delight in remaining motionless whenever I entered one of those dark rooms, so that I might take him for a divan, and seat myself upon him. But I must not keep you standing any longer in this chilly air. You will excuse me, I am sure, if I do not offer to accompany you to the yard.'

And so the old lady vanished through the doorway, followed by M. de Fontvieille, who, after a moment's hesitation between dread of rheumatism and doubt as to the prudence of leaving Jeanne alone any longer with the Englishman, found the former consideration the weightier of the two, and yielded to it accordingly.

Barrington was very willing to excuse both the old people. He followed Jeanne across the courtyard to the stable, whose tenants squealed and hinnied, as only Arab horses can, at the entrance of their mistress; was presented to the unattrac-

tive Jérémie, to the wild boar, to numerous dogs, and finally to a pair of beautiful soft-eyed gazelles, the male of whom no sooner espied the stranger than, with a grunt of defiance, he put his head down, dashed at him like an express train, and would probably have succeeded in producing a humiliating catastrophe, had not his mistress caught him deftly by the horns in mid-career, and held him captive in her strong white hands.

Shortly afterwards Barrington took his leave, having obtained permission to return on the following day, and set to work in earnest upon his picture.

In a letter which he addressed, about this time, to the same friend at whose correspondence we have already had a glimpse, occurs, *inter alia*, the following passage :—

'It is a great mistake to suppose, as many people do, that feminine beauty of form consists solely in rounded outlines, and that any appearance of strength is a defect in a woman. I hate fat arms, and flabby, dimpled, powerless hands. Nature no more intended hands and arms to look like that than she intended a prize pig to be so heavy that his legs will not support his weight. Women ought to be able to use their limbs freely.

And if ever you meet a beautiful girl with strong wrists in whom you feel an interest, take my advice and buy her a gazelle—or if you can't get a gazelle, perhaps a billy-goat might do. Encourage the beast to charge at her, and teach her to catch him neatly by the horns when he is going full tilt. Of course he will bowl her over as clean as a whistle at first, but she mustn't mind that. Once she has acquired the knack of seizing him at the right moment, she will find the result will be worth any bruises he may have given her in teaching her the lesson; and it will be worth ten times the money you have paid for him to see the picture the girl will make as she holds the struggling brute in a perfectly firm grasp, but without any unbecoming exertion.'

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME DE TRÉMONVILLE AT HOME.

The grave, silent Arabs, who, with their long strings of camels, leave Algiers by the Bab-Azoun, and, following the curve of the bay, set their faces in a south-easterly direction; the sturdy Kabyles, trudging towards their native mountains, with money, well earned by a month or so of hard labour in the town, in their purses; the farmers and butchers, on their way to the great weekly cattle-market at Bouffarik; the strangers, whose guide-books command them to visit Blidah and the far-famed Gorge of the Chiffa—all these, before they have well accomplished three miles of their journey, pass, on their left hand, a pleasant, shady domain, where avenues of palm and plane and eucalyptus, parterres gay with many-tinted flowers, and cool, dark vistas, at the edge of which a glint of foam shows where the breakers meet the shore, might tempt the wayfarer to turn aside out

of the heat and dust, and rest awhile, if the exigencies of business permitted of such delay. This property, which bears the modest title of the 'Jardin d'Essai,' was set aside by the French Government, shortly after the conquest of Algiers, for the establishment of a great nursery-garden, and for the acclimatisation of tropical plants. It has answered its purpose well; and at the present time it is not only a boon to colonists, but a charming, cool retreat, where lazy people can dream away an hour or two in that contentment of idleness which can only be enjoyed in its perfection under southern skies.

Thither wandered M. de Saint-Luc, on a warm, still afternoon; and seating himself at the end of one of the alleys, fell, as of late it had become habitual to him to do, into a melancholy reverie. From the point at which he had taken up his position the shore took an inward sweep, so that a broad stretch of blue and glittering sea intervened between him and the town of Algiers, which rose abruptly from the water, white and dazzling, like a city of marble, against its green background.

Saint-Luc surveyed the prospect with a sigh. His thoughts reverted to the time—infinitely remote, as it now seemed—when, as a gay young

Chasseur d'Afrique, without much money to spend, but with a fine stock of health and animal spirits, he had fought in Kabylia under old Marshal Randon, and when, the campaign being ended, he had been ordered to Algiers with his regiment, and had come in sight of the town on just such a fine afternoon as this. There had been a good deal of laughing and joking between him and his brother officers, he remembered—much mutual congratulation upon their safe return to civilised luxuries; and it had been agreed that they were to treat themselves that evening to the best dinner that Algiers could produce, and to go to the theatre afterwards. But he had not gone to either dinner or theatre; for, on his arrival, a letter had been handed to him which briefly announced that his old father was dead, and had left him a rich man.

'It was my last day of happiness,' sighed Saint-Luc, forgetful of the commencement of his Parisian career, which had been merry enough until satiety had robbed it of its charm. 'When I sailed for France, I left my youth behind me, and never knew what I had lost till it was far past retrieving. Ah! if I had met her then! Or if I could be young now!' How many years was it since Saint-

Luc and his comrades had ridden gallantly home from the hill country of the discomfited Kabyles? How many years? And how much had they held that a man could look back upon with any kind of comfort or pride? Once he had broken his right arm in a steeple-chase at La Marche, and had scrambled on to his horse again and won the race, amidst roars of applause; once he had broken the bank at Baden; and once he had disarmed the famous Duc de Chaumont St.-Hilaire in a duel. These were his triumphs; and time had been when he had contemplated them with some self-approval. In his present mood, he recalled them with profound disgust. Such feats might command the homage of a Madame de Trémonville; but with Jeanne, as he knew, they were not likely to count for much.

'She despises me,' he thought; 'and *parbleu*! I am inclined to share in her sentiments. If she felt any admiration for me, it is I who should despise her. What right have I to expect that she, in her proud purity, should stoop to marry a half-ruined spendthrift? The wisest thing I could do would be to take myself off back to France—only that is no longer possible. I must wait on, and take my dismissal from her own lips. It

will not kill me—but I wish I had illusions enough left to be able to believe that it would!'

The sound of approaching wheels interrupted his dismal self-communing, and at the same moment he heard himself called by name.

Léon de Mersac, driving a low pony-carriage, had pulled up a few yards from the dreamer, and was contemplating him in undisguised astonishment.

'You here!' he exclaimed. 'What in the world are you doing in the Jardin d'Essai, all by yourself?'

'I am doing nothing,' answered Saint-Luc, getting up. 'It is the habit of the country, is it not?'

'It is not my habit,' said Léon; 'I have always plenty to do—too much even. For instance, I ought to be at the market at Bouffarik to-day; instead of which, I have to go and call upon Madame de Trémonville. Will you come?

'I would rather send my card by you.'

Léon shook his head. 'She would not like that. She always expects her friends to call in person.'

'Am I one of her friends? I did not know it,' said Saint-Luc; 'but if I must go, I may as well

go with you. And by-the-by, Léon,' he added, as he seated himself in the pony-carriage, 'I was thinking of saying a word or two to you about that lady, if you will not think it too great a liberty.'

'Say what you please. I shall think nothing a liberty that comes from you,' answered Léon, politely.

'I am going to make you angry, nevertheless. Well, you must try to forgive me. Do you know that this good Madame de Trémonville is amusing herself by trying to make a fool of you?'

'No,' answered Léon, decidedly; 'I do not know it. You misunderstand her; and I am not surprised at your doing so, for she is fond of admiration, like all women who are young and pretty; but she is not a coquette. If you were as well acquainted with her as I am, you would have no feeling towards her but one of the deepest compassion; for, though perhaps you might not suppose it from seeing her in public, she is very unhappy.'

'So those perennial smiles, and that charming flow of animation, only disguise an aching heart. How sad!'

'It is easy to sneer,' returned Léon; 'but

what would you have her do? Would you prefer that she should go about moaning, and depress everybody by showing a dismal face?'

'Certainly not. I was only admiring the fortitude with which she bears the neglect of an unsympathetic husband—for that, I presume, is the affliction she suffers from.'

'How did you guess that?' exclaimed Léon, quite astonished at this striking proof of Saint-Luc's penetration. 'But, to be sure, anybody might see how ill-suited to her that dull, vulgar old man is. They have not a thought nor a taste in common; and he treats her with the most ostentatious indifference. Sometimes, when she speaks of him, she cannot restrain her tears.'

'And you dry them for her? *Allons, allons*, my friend; you are accepting a part in a very old comedy. It is one that I have played more than once myself, and I know it by heart. If my own past life gave me the right to offer counsel to a young man, I should recommend you to decline such a *rôle*, though it involves little risk, except that of exhibiting yourself in a somewhat ridiculous aspect to your friends, so long as you remember that you are merely acting. But if you take it into your head to be in earnest over the

affair, the case is different, and you may incur a good deal of needless unhappiness. Whatever you do, don't take Madame de Trémonville seriously. Believe me, she is not worth it, and does not expect it. Amuse yourself with her, if you must; but don't put faith in all she says; above all, don't be absurd enough to fall in love with her. Formerly there were two classes of women—*dévotes* and women of the world: one knew what to expect of each of them, and suited one's conduct towards them accordingly; but in these days a third class has sprung up, and is becoming more numerous than either of the others—a class of women who are worldly without being witty; whose religion, of which they make a conspicuous display, is nothing but a superstition; who are mostly very ignorant, who have no merit, except that of dressing well, and no passions but vanity and a certain mean ambition. It is a mass of such charming creatures that forms the upper layer of fashionable society in France, under his Majesty Napoleon III., whom Heaven preserve! There are exceptions here and there, of course, but I am much mistaken if your Madame de Trémonville is one of them.'

'You are a man of the world,' said Léon, 'and

naturally know more of the state of society at large than I can pretend to do. Also, like most men of the world, you have a habit of generalising which is apt to lead you into errors with regard to individuals. You are altogether wrong, for instance, in your judgment of Madame de Trémonville, who is neither ignorant, nor vain, nor irreligious. But you can discover her true character for yourself, if you care to take the trouble : I have no particular wish to influence your opinion.'

'As you please. Let us admit her to be an angel. I still don't see what good result you propose to gain by making love to her.'

'I propose nothing, and I am not making love to her,' answered Léon, flicking the near pony impatiently with his whip. 'And, with your permission, I should prefer to change the subject.'

'I told you I should make you angry,' remarked Saint-Luc, as the carriage turned in at Madame de Trémonville's gates.

'I am not in the least angry,' returned Léon; 'but I see no use in discussing a state of affairs which does not exist—that is all.'

And so he pulled up at the door of the villa ; and Saint-Luc, with the conviction, common to

most wise counsellors, that he might as well have held his tongue, got out and rang the bell.

The visitors were at once admitted into the presence of the lady of the house, whom they found sitting on a footstool, surrounded by officers in staff-uniforms, all of whom were busily engaged in tearing up newspapers into small scraps.

'Ah messieurs! you arrive *à propos*,' she cried. 'You shall take part in our *chasse*. M. de Saint-Luc, you, no doubt, are already acquainted with the rules of the game. A bag full of paper is given to one of the party, who represents the hare, and who starts in any direction he pleases, scattering the paper behind him. The rest, who act as hounds, follow, after the interval of a minute, upon his track, and the chase continues till the hare is caught, or the scent exhausted. The hare, if he is captured, pays fifty francs into the box which you see, for the benefit of the poor; if, on the other hand, he escape, each of the hounds must contribute twenty francs to the same object. There is also a fine of twenty francs for any hound who leaves the scent, or gives up the pursuit.'

In this manner Madame de Trémonville combined amusement with benevolence. It has

already been said that she was not averse to such forms of romping as she conceived to be sanctioned by the decrees of fashion; and this notion of a paper-chase, wafted to her by some echo from Compiègne, had taken her fancy as well as that of her admirers. 'It will be no novelty to you, monsieur,' she continued, addressing Saint-Luc; 'but you will hardly expect to meet with novelty in our barbarous colony. It is something to do—one runs about and one laughs—*voila!*'

It struck Saint-Luc as possible that one might sit still and laugh, or even sit still without laughing; either of which alternatives he would have preferred to the one suggested to him; but he was not so ungracious as to give utterance to his sentiments, and began to tear up paper with polite resignation.

'Will not you sing us something, madame, while we prepare the scent?' asked one of the officers; and Madame de Trémonville consented, without waiting to be pressed. She seated herself at the piano, and sang, with a good deal of spirit, a ballad, the words of which were hardly open to objection, though there was something in the manner of their delivery which the performer

mentally qualified as '*chic*,' and her audience as '*risqué*.'

The officers glanced at one another and smiled furtively; Saint-Luc preserved a countenance of blank impassibility; but Léon, mindful of the conversation which had occupied his drive from the Jardin d'Essai, reddened and frowned.

Madame de Trémonville was not slow to detect these signs of displeasure. 'Look at M. de Mersac!' she cried. 'He is actually blushing for me. And yet I had chosen the most innocent song in my *repertoire*, out of special deference to his prejudices. M. le Marquis has lately become of a simplicity quite Arcadian. I think even that his thoughts wander sometimes to some shepherdess or other—is it not so, monsieur? Ah! you blush still more. I would stake my diamond ring against the straw hat whose brim you are trying to pull off, that you are in love.'

'Then you would lose your ring, madame. I beg to assure you that I am not in the very least in love with any human creature.'

Madame de Trémonville laughed. 'You speak with such emphasis that we must believe you,' she said; 'but you need not be angry. It is no

disgrace to be in love; is it M. de Longueil? You ought to know.'

'I hope not; I know it is a misfortune,' replied the officer addressed, with a languishing look at his hostess.

'M. de Longueil is always in love, and is always successful—at least, so he says,' continued the lady. 'Ah! these *beaux sabreurs*! who can withstand them? Since his Mexican campaign, M. de Longueil has been irresistible.'

The young man, who in truth had been invalided home almost immediately after his landing in Mexico, and had had to put up with some good-humoured raillery from his comrades on the subject, winced perceptibly under this unexpected attack, to the great joy of his assailant. She liked to say occasional sharp things to her adorers, to hurt their feelings, and set them against one another. It was her way of paying them out for the free-and-easy fashion in which they usually treated her; and she was the more able to indulge her taste, inasmuch as she was perfectly well aware that she could at any moment, with a slight effort, disperse the clouds which her remarks might have called up. She soon found

means to restore M. de Longueil to good humour; and, seeing that Léon still sat, silent and sulky, by himself, she took an opportunity to cross the room to him, and whisper confidentially, 'They are so scandalous—they had remarked that you were constantly here. I was obliged to say something to divert their suspicions.'

Whereupon that infatuated youth immediately recovered his spirits, and joined in the general entreaty that the paper-chase might now be allowed to begin.

Lots were drawn to decide who should first act as hare, and the lot fell upon M. de Longueil. He took up his bag and started at once through the open door, and they heard his footsteps dying away on the gravel outside, while Madame de Trémonville, watch in hand, awaited the expiration of the stipulated minute. Then, time being up, the whole party set out in hot pursuit, keeping scrupulously to the scent, and imitating, with indifferent success, the baying of a pack in full cry. Out into the blazing sunshine they rushed, helter-skelter, down the slope of the garden, through a hedge of aloes, into a narrow shady lane, still paved with the slabs which the Romans had left there in the days of Julius Cæsar; then

up the hill again, panting and laughing, across a meadow, through another hedge or two, over a low wall, into the chinks of which the affrighted lizards darted, and so back to their starting-point. Madame de Trémonville kept the lead with Léon at her elbow; the others were close behind; and far in the rear Saint-Luc, who had no special aptitude for playing the fool, trotted resignedly, emitting from time to time, as in duty bound, a brief, mournful bark. The hare was now in sight, and, confident in his powers of outstripping his pursuers, began to amuse himself by doubling, passing within a foot or two of the distressed pack, and stimulating their ardour with sundry insulting jeers. But his triumph was short. Looking over his shoulder to fling back a derisive shout, he stumbled on the edge of a flower-bed, and, falling prone into a cluster of rose-bushes, was ignominiously captured by Madame de Trémonville, to whom he ruefully handed over his fine of fifty francs.

Fate now selected as victim M. de Saint-Luc, who promptly offered to pay fine in default; but this proposition being received with marked disfavour, he was fain to accept the bag of paper handed to him; his disgust being somewhat miti-

gated by the permission accorded to his request that he might, if he so pleased, confine his progress to the house. For he thought, 'So long as I remain within four walls, I shall at least escape the risk of sunstroke, and, what is more important, I shall be in no danger of being seen in this very ridiculous position by any chance acquaintance who may be passing in the neighbourhood.'

He left behind him, therefore, a tortuous track, leading now into one room, now into another, out into the verandah and back again, and finally up the staircase. It was not until he had darted in and out of M. de Trémonville's dressing-room, and was becoming hard pressed by the hounds, who, with shouts of laughter, were following closely upon his heels, that a happy inspiration occurred to him. Why should he not escape from the house, run down to the high road, beyond which nobody would be likely to follow him, and so slip quietly down home? Full of this idea, he dashed down the stairs, three steps at the time, flung open the front door, and—plunged headlong into the arms of Madame de Vaublanc, who, in her very best clothes, was coming to pay a visit of ceremony after the ball.

'*Mais, monsieur!*' shrieked that astonished lady, reeling back and involuntarily ringing a tremendous peal with the bell-handle which she had grasped for support.

Saint-Luc felt it to be rather hard luck that Madame de Vaublanc should have chosen that day of all others for paying her respects at the Villa de Trémonville; but it was worse that she should have brought Mademoiselle de Mersac with her; and what was worst of all was, that his lively hostess, unconscious of the appearance of any fresh personages upon the scene, must needs bounce out through the half-open door, and fling her arms round him with a cry of triumph. Léon, who, as usual, was following close upon her heels, opened his mouth to re-echo the shout, but shut it again abruptly when he became aware of his sister's calm brown eyes fixed upon him in wondering interrogation. The rest of the pack, having had time to perceive the state of affairs, quietly and discreetly vanished.

There was a brief, uncomfortable pause, during which the five persons who stood face to face in the full light of the sinking sun, contemplated one another with varied feelings. Léon looked, as he felt, very much like a schoolboy caught out of

bounds; Madame de Trémonville, for once in her life, was a little disconcerted; Saint-Luc leant against the wall, with folded arms, the picture of calm despair; and Jeanne, remembering the promise she had extorted from this unfortunate delinquent, was at no pains to hide the disgust and contempt with which his duplicity filled her. Only Madame de Vaublanc, scrutinising the flushed cheeks and disordered hair of her enemy, smiled with grim satisfaction, and sang an inward pæan at the shrine of Nemesis the Just.

'An orgy, mesdames—a veritable orgy!' she hissed, describing the scene subsequently to an eager circle of listeners. 'If you had seen her, with her hair down her back and her eyes blazing, clutch M. de Saint-Luc round the neck, you would have thought, as I declare I did for a moment, that she had gone out of her mind. The poor Vicomte, who did not appear to enjoy his position, fumbled in his pocket and handed her two or three napoleons. It was to save himself from some penalty, I presume—though what worse punishment he could have feared than being embraced by that woman, I do not pretend to say. You will easily believe that I declined to enter the house, though she recovered herself, after a

minute, and begged us to do so, suggesting even, in the insolent manner that you know of, that we should join in the game we had interrupted. "Many thanks, madame," said I; "but, from what I have seen of your game, it seems to me to be one fitted neither for old women nor for young girls!" And with that I took my leave. The two gentlemen followed immediately, and caught us up before we were out of the avenue. I was glad to see that they both looked very much ashamed of themselves.'

Ashamed of themselves they undoubtedly were, but in very different degrees of intensity. Léon's humiliation was lessened by a strong admixture of that odd pride which youths of all nations would appear to take in publicly exposing their idiocy where a pretty woman is concerned; whereas that of Saint-Luc contained no consoling element whatever, and was the more bitter because he felt it to be wholly undeserved.

It was in the hope of exculpating himself in some degree, that he hurried after Madame de Vaublanc and Jeanne.

'You are taking the wrong turning, M. de Saint-Luc,' said the latter lady. 'Our road leads directly away from the town.'

'I am going to make my way back by El Biar and the Frais Vallon,' he explained. 'It is a much prettier walk.'

To this Jeanne vouchsafed no rejoinder; and, somehow or other, Saint-Luc found himself presently walking beside slow-paced Madame de Vaublanc, while the two tall figures of Mademoiselle de Mersac and her brother were drawing rapidly away in front. It is highly improbable hat he would have got speech of Jeanne again that day, if the old lady at his side had not happened to be cognisant of the Duchess's wishes with respect to him, and a staunch supporter of them. As it was, she soon gave him his opportunity.

'Stop, my children, stop!' she cried, when they reached the entrance of a narrow stony lane; 'let us take the short cut.'

'You will find it rough walking, madame,' said Jeanne, doubtfully.

'Eh, mon Dieu! I prefer spoiling my boots to making a circuit of two miles. M. le Marquis will kindly lend me the support of his arm, I have no doubt.'

And so, the path being too narrow to admit of more than two persons walking abreast, Jeanne

had to fall back, and accept Saint-Luc's society, whether she liked it or not. Silently they scrambled over the rocks and boulders, Saint-Luc offering an assisting hand from time to time, and being as often politely but firmly waved aside. At length he stopped short, and faced his companion.

'Mademoiselle,' said he.

'Monsieur.'

'You are angry with me.'

'I assure you I was not thinking about you.'

She looked down upon him from the rocky ledge upon which she was standing. A tangled growth of cactus and myrtle and asphodel, overspread with festoons of the pale green clematis, rose behind her, and from between the silvery leaves of the olive-tree over her head rays of sunlight streamed down and made moving patterns of light and shade upon her white dress. Her beautiful lips were curved into a smile of innocent candour, into which a touch of perfect disdain had somehow found its way. It was not the least strange feature in Saint-Luc's infatuation that the small stabs which Jeanne was always inflicting upon him never angered, but only hurt him. In the old Paris days he had not borne the reputation of a man easily snubbed, and had never

failed to hold his own against any man or woman who had shown a disposition to attack him; but he had no retort ready now, and had no wish to seek for one. He resumed, quite humbly, 'I ought perhaps to have said that, as far as appearances go, you have reason to be angry with me. I promised, you know, to try and keep your brother away from Madame de Trémonville, and in truth I have done what I could. I was speaking to him about her this very afternoon, and my visit to her was meant to be as much one of ceremony as your own. I certainly should not have gone, if I had had any idea that I should be forced into playing that ridiculous game.'

'Why should you not play any game that you find amusing?' returned Jeanne, indifferently. 'It was foolish in me to speak to you about Léon and Madame de Trémonville at all. Will you please forget that I ever said anything upon the subject?'

'Just as you please, mademoiselle; but why do you say that your speaking to me was foolish?'

'I will say useless, if you prefer it. Pray let us talk no more about it.'

Saint-Luc was silent for a few minutes; then he broke out abruptly—'Why do you mistrust me

so, mademoiselle? I could not prevent your brother from calling upon Madame de Trémonville this afternoon. I told him what I thought of her, and advised him to drop her acquaintance. What more could I, or anyone, do? I have been unfortunate enough to incur your dislike: I have seen that for some time, and have no right to complain of it; but at least I have never given you any reason to suppose that I do not tell the truth. What makes you think so ill of me?'

Jeanne had resumed her march; but she faced about upon this challenge. 'It is not that I dislike or distrust you, M. de Saint-Luc,' she said; 'and I don't think that you mean unkindly towards Léon; but sometimes I feel afraid for him—he has changed so much of late. After what you have said, I am sure that you have done your best to warn him, though I confess I did not think so just now. But I suppose the truth is, that Léon has reached an age at which warnings are not of much service. He is at an age, too, when young men generally imitate those about them.'

'I understand. And I am not an example to be imitated. You are perfectly right, mademoiselle; no one could have wasted his life more hopelessly than I have done; also no one could

be more conscious of his worthlessness than I am. At the same time, I don't think your brother has learnt much harm from me since I have been here. The only bad habit of any sort or kind that he has seen me indulge in is occasional gambling; and if you wish it, I will gladly promise you now never to touch a card again so long as I am in Algiers.'

'No, no!' she interrupted, hastily; 'let us have no promises. Who knows whether it would be possible to keep them? I cannot expect you to change all your habits to suit my convenience; and, indeed, I should not wish it. We will try to be better friends for the future,' she added, extending her hand to him frankly.

He took it, held it in his own for a second, and then let it fall. It was probably the very first time in his life that he had allowed a woman's hand to escape from his possession without a pressure.

'You know that the will is not wanting on my part,' he answered, in a low voice.

Her brow clouded, but cleared again almost at once, and she looked at him not unkindly.

'I wish——' she began, and then broke off.

And Saint-Luc never knew in what manner

she had intended to finish her sentence; for at that moment Madame de Vaublanc's shrill voice was heard calling, 'Jeanne, make haste! you will keep Madame la Duchesse waiting for dinner.' And so the colloquy came to an end

CHAPTER IX.

GRANDE KABYLIE.

In selecting for narration a portion out of the lives of certain people, and endeavouring to interest others therein, the veracious historian is apt, ere long, to find himself hemmed in between two difficulties. For whereas if, upon the one hand, he attempt to follow the subjects of his story through those uneventful scenes in which, generally speaking, their desires, their characters, and their destinies slowly develop themselves, he is in danger of becoming tedious to his readers, it is certain, upon the other, that if he pass over such periods in silence, he must risk the charge of inconsequence. The former peril appearing, all things considered, the more formidable of the two, it seems wisest to the present chronicler to dismiss in as few sentences as may be all account of the months of April and May, 1870—precisely the two months, as it happens, of which the person-

ages with whom he is concerned have since declared that they cherish a keener, fonder memory than of any other period of their career.

The fact is, that nothing whatever took place during these two months but what might have been anticipated from the outset. Barrington finished his picture, began a second one, and established himself upon a footing of complete intimacy at the Campagne de Mersac; Léon went on flirting foolishly with Madame de Trémonville; Saint-Luc, though more at his ease with Jeanne, and more kindly received by her after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, made but little advance towards the fulfilment of his hopes; the Duchess and M. de Fontvieille continued their abortive support of the luckless suitor; and old Time plodded on in his dogged, relentless way, bringing all of them nearer and nearer to the inevitable end. Here is an extract from Barrington's correspondence—the last with which the reader shall be troubled—whence the results of eight weeks of glorious weather, combined with lamentable supineness on the part of those who should have been able to exercise some control over the march of events, may be succinctly gleaned.

'Your last letter tickled me immensely. That you should claim credit for penetration in having discovered the very thing that I have been laboriously striving for some time past to make clear to you, is such a good joke that I am sure you will never see the point of it. "Mark my words," you observe in that pithy and sagacious style which is all your own, "you are falling in love with that Mademoiselle Thingummy; and if I don't see you home before the Derby is run, I shall look upon your case as a hopeless one!" I had been laughing at your letter from the commencement; but when I reached that sentence, I positively roared. Why, my dear, good soul, of course I am in love with Mademoiselle de Mersac (of whom, by the way, I will thank you not to speak as "Mademoiselle Thingummy" again). The indisputable fact that nobody could be as much in her society as I have been without falling in love with her, is one with which you cannot be expected to be acquainted; but if you haven't burnt my previous letters, and will refer back to them, you will surely admit that I have never drawn the thinnest veil over my attachment—or at least, if I have (for I don't exactly remember all I may have said), it has been one that any fool

might have seen through. Heavens and earth! what is it that makes people talk of love as though there were something ridiculous in it—something to be ashamed of? Is it ignorance, or folly, or envy? Ignorance it cannot be, for everybody must have been in love at least once; in your case, I should imagine it to be a mixture of the two latter causes. Come, old fellow, you and I have been friends ever since we wore jackets and turn-down collars, and played fives against the chapel-wall on Saturday afternoons, because we were too small to be allowed possession of one of the fives-courts; we have wintered one another and summered one another, and I have a right to put any question I please to you, and to expect a truthful reply. Divest yourself for a few minutes of your twopenny-halfpenny cynicism, and tell me honestly—Wouldn't you give a year's income to be in love yourself? Wouldn't your heart leap with joy if you could feel again the delicious tremors, the exquisite joys, the doubts, the fears, the hopes of bygone days? Wouldn't you, if you could, choose to live again, in a queer, delightful, glorified world, inhabited, for all practical purposes, by one person only besides yourself? Wouldn't you, on the approach of that person, like to

experience a certain odd spasm, half painful, half delightful, somewhere about the middle of your waistcoat?—it is a physical sensation, and you know it as well as I do, if your memory is not growing feeble. Ah, my dear old boy, there's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream! Love's middle-aged dream is a very close imitation of it—*experto crede*! Oh, talk not to me of a name great in story! What are honours and wealth and gratified ambition in comparison with this divine ecstasy? It is a disease, you will grunt. I don't say no; but it is sent straight from heaven.

> Oh, Fame, if I e'er took delight in thy praises,
> 'Twas less for the sake of thy high-sounding phrases
> Than to see the bright eyes of the dear one discover
> She thought that I was not unworthy to love her.

You will perhaps pardon my bursting into poetry; it is a trick incidental to my condition. I see you reading this in your arm-chair at the club, doubled up with merriment, your long nose almost touching your chin, as it does in moments when you are enjoying a fancied superiority over one of your fellow-creatures. My dear fellow, you are most heartily welcome to your joke. Your cor-

respondence is often so irresistibly comical to me, that it would be hard indeed if I were to grudge you an occasional chuckle; and in the present instance I can't help thinking that I have the best of the laugh.

'Yes, I am in love with Jeanne de Mersac; and I rejoice in being so! Your sage and trite warnings against what you are pleased to term a "romantic marriage with a foreigner," and your doubts as to how a Frenchwoman and a Catholic would be received by the society of Surrey, are altogether irrelevant to the subject, and I am not going to discuss their soundness. The notion that love and marriage are inseparably connected, and that the one is invariably and necessarily a prelude to the other, always seems to me to arise out of a certain vulgarity of mind. You, who are nothing if not conventional, probably hold a different opinion; but really, if you will think for a moment of the refining, ennobling influence of love—of how it takes us out of ourselves and raises us above the level of this commonplace, sordid world; and if you will then consider the perfectly earthly character of marriage, with its dull respectabilities and tedious monotony—you will perceive the bathos of degrading the

former into a mere stepping-stone towards the latter.

> Ach! des Lebens schönste Feier
> Endigt auch den Lebensmai,
> Mit dem Gürtel, mit dem Schleier
> Reiszt der schöne Wahn entzwei!

I don't, of course, mean to assert that a man should not marry the woman he loves, or even that matters may not end that way in my own case; I simply say that love is enough. I decline to be worried with remote contingencies. I fall down and worship at the feet of this beautiful goddess; I bask in the sunshine of her smiles, and I am content. I don't know, and don't want to know, towards what rocks and shoals I may be drifting. I have not even the slightest clue as to the state of her feelings towards myself. I know that she *likes* me, but more than that I cannot say. Sometimes I get a look or a word which makes me tremble with hope; sometimes I am greeted with the most discouraging friendliness. I accept it all with such equanimity as I can muster; and am thankful that at least I am spared the pangs of jealousy; for my one rival (that Saint-Luc of whom I have already written to you) is scarcely formidable. I pity that poor devil.

I don't like him, as I think I have said before, but I am genuinely sorry for him. He is a man with whom you would find yourself in complete sympathy, for his love is of that uncompromising kind which leads direct to the Mairie and the altar, and will be satisfied with nothing less. Humility appears to be his idea of courtship. In Jeanne's presence he is silent, and rather awkward. He gazes at her with great eyes of despair, he agrees with every word that she utters, and he sends her bouquets three or four times a week. Bouquets! That of itself is sufficient to stamp the man, and to show how little he understands the lady whose affections he hopes to captivate. Cut flowers, if you like—though she has more roses in her own garden than she knows what to do with; but bouquets—stiff, accurate bouquets—arranged by means of wires and surrounded by a border of perforated paper—to *her*! But what can you expect of a man who says, "Mademoiselle, permit me to congratulate you upon your exquisite toilette!" or, "Mademoiselle, allow me to offer you my compliments upon your charming coiffure!" and then imagines that he has made himself agreeable? I think she would hate him, but for her goodness and generosity. I can't

believe that anything would ever induce her to become his wife, though all her friends and relations favour the match, and make no secret of their wishes.

'It is not likely that you will see me at the Derby this year. I don't care a brass farthing what wins, and shall not take advantage of your tip about Macgregor. The life which I am now leading—and which entirely satisfies my soul—has interests independent of horse-racing; and, indeed, of the world (in your sense of the word) altogether. I very seldom glance at a newspaper. I haven't the faintest idea of what is taking place in the Parliament of Great Britain; it is as much as I can do to get up a feeble excitement over the Emperor's *plébiscite*, which is making a great stir in this rather Radical community. You ask how I manage to kill time, and whether I have had any sport. Well, I have shot a wild boar and an eagle and an old Kabyle woman whom I peppered about the legs in mistake for a quail, and who raised no end of hullabaloo, refusing to be pacified at any less price than a hundred francs; but the fact is, I don't care about going very far away from the town. I have always plenty to do; and, whether it is the delicious

climate, or whether it is the result of my mental condition, I can't say, but I am always in the best of health and spirits. I begin to whistle quite naturally as soon as I wake in the morning. I get up and have a bathe in the sea; then I come home to breakfast; then I paint a little; and then I pretty generally ride up to El Biar, where the De Mersacs live. There is often a dance somewhere in the evening. Failing that, I play a game or two of billiards with one or other of the young French officers quartered here — not half bad fellows, by the way—or else I climb up the narrow streets of the old town and get a peep at some weird Moorish ceremony or *fête*. I have no plans at present, and have no wish to form any. It is possible that I may be at home for Ascot, but it is not probable. I suppose the heat will drive me north eventually; but, as far as I can see, there will be no necessity for a move on that score for some time to come; and I don't see why I should pack up before I am obliged. The London season has no temptations for me. Indeed, setting aside all personal feeling in the matter, I am convinced that Algiers is an infinitely more agreeable place of residence in the month of May than London.'

Here we may take leave of Mr. Barrington's rather long-winded narrative. The impression produced by it upon the mind of its recipient was one which may very possibly be shared in by the reader. 'Just like Barrington!' he muttered, as he restored the bulky epistle to its envelope. 'For a man who goes in for philanthropy and that kind of thing, I must say he is about the most selfish beggar out. Making love is very good fun, as everybody knows; but, hang it all! if a man don't mean anything by it, it's deuced hard lines on the girl.'

Mademoiselle de Mersac would have been very much astonished if this expression of opinion could have reached her ears. That her peace of mind was likely to become in any way endangered through the proximity of Mr. Barrington was a notion which certainly had not as yet suggested itself to her. She had liked him from the outset; he belonged to a different species from that of the men who had hitherto come in her way; she fancied, rightly or wrongly, that he was more honest and manly than they; and, as she grew to know him better, her liking for him increased, till his visits became almost a necessary part of her daily life. She knew also, of course,

that he admired her. But from admiration, or liking, to love is a long step, and Jeanne did not choose to think that Mr. Barrington had taken it —much less that she could have done so herself.

So, as the Duchess had a happy faculty of disbelieving in inconvenient potentialities; as M. de Fontvieille found it wisest, as a general thing, to hold the same opinions as the Duchess; as Léon was too much occupied with his own concerns to keep a watchful eye upon those of his sister; and, as Saint-Luc had no power to speak a warning word, it came to pass that Barrington arrived at the Campagne de Mersac every day as regularly as the post, and that poor M. de Saint-Luc, who never ventured to present himself more than twice in the course of a week, invariably found his rival installed in the drawing-room when he was announced, and was not unfrequently made to feel that his entrance had interrupted a pleasant conversation.

In the first days of June, when the Hôtel d'Orient and the Hôtel de la Régence had bidden adieu to the last of their winter guests; when the Governor-General had migrated from the town to his fairy-like palace on the leafy heights of Mustapha; when the smaller fry of officials were, in

imitation of him and in preparation for the hot season, transplanting themselves and their families to the coolest attainable villas; when the aloes were in flower and the air was full of a hundred faint scents, and the corn and barley fields were very nearly ripe for the sickle—at the time of year, in short, when the luxuriant life and rich beauty of Algeria were at their climax—it occurred to Léon that it would be a good thing to make a journey into Kabylia. For in the grassy plains of that region, near the first spurs of the great Djurdjura range, dwelt one Señor Lopez, a Spanish colonist and a breeder of horses, who was generally open to a deal, and who, at this particular time, had a nice lot of foals on hand, out of some of which a discriminating young man might see his way to make honest profit. But as few people, be they never so self-confident, like to rely upon their own judgment alone in so delicate a matter as the purchase of a foal, Léon conceived it to be a *sine quâ non* that his sister should accompany him. And then M. de Saint-Luc, hearing of the projected expedition, must needs declare that he could not possibly leave Algeria without revisiting the scene of his former campaigns, and that the opportunity of doing so in

congenial society was one that he would not miss for any imaginable consideration. After which, oddly enough, Mr. Barrington, too, found out that to make acquaintance with the mountain scenery of Kabylia had always been one of his fondest dreams, and added—why not push on a little farther, and see some of the hill-villages and the famous Fort Napoléon?

Neither Léon nor Jeanne offered any objection to this plan; but when it was communicated to the Duchess, she held up her hands in horror and amazement.

'And your chaperon, mademoiselle?' she ejaculated. And the truth is that both the young folks had overlooked this necessary addition to their party.

Now, as the Duchess herself would no more have thought of undertaking a weary drive of three or four days' duration over stony places than of ordering a fiery chariot to drive her straight to heaven, and as no other available lady of advanced years could be discovered, it seemed, for a time, as if either Mademoiselle de Mersac or her two admirers would have to remain in Algiers; but at the last moment a *deus ex machinâ* was found in the person of M. de Fontvieille, who

announced his willingness to join the party, and who, as Léon politely remarked, when he was out of ear-shot, was, to all intents and purposes, as good as any old woman.

Poor old M. de Fontvieille! Nobody thanked him for what was an act of pure good-nature and self-sacrifice—nobody, at least, except Jeanne, who, by way of testifying her gratitude, spent a long morning with him, examining his collection of gems and listening to the oft-told tale of their several acquisitions, and, at the end, presented him with an exquisite Marshal Niel rose-bud for his button-hole.

'Ah, mademoiselle,' said he, as he pinned the flower into his coat, 'you do well to reserve your roses for old men, who appreciate such gifts at their right value. Give none to the young fellows; it would only increase their vanity, which is great enough already.'

'I never give roses to anybody,' said Jeanne.

'So much the better. Continue, my child, to observe that wise rule. And remember that if the Lily of France is a stiffer flower than the Rose of England, it is still our own, and French women ought to love it best.'

'What do you mean?' asked Jeanne, who objected to insinuations.

'I mean nothing, my dear; lilies, I am aware, are out of fashion; choose violets if you prefer them,' answered the old gentleman, with a chuckle.

And Jeanne, having no rejoinder ready, took up her sunshade in dignified silence, and went home.

In the garden she met Barrington and Léon, and to them she communicated her design for the journey in her usual brief, authoritative fashion. 'We will take the light carriage,' she said. 'Pierre Cauvin can drive us; and M. de Fontvieille, Mr. Barrington, and I can occupy it. M. de Saint-Luc can ride with you, Léon.'

'But I think Saint-Luc would like to drive part of the way,' answered Léon.

'Oh, no; why should he? He is sure to prefer riding.'

'We can change about,' said Barrington, magnanimously; and then the subject dropped.

But when the appointed day came, M. de Saint-Luc rode up to the door, with a very long face, and announced that it would be impossible for him to leave Algiers for the next forty-eight

hours at least. 'An old friend and brother-officer of mine arrived from Oran last night,' he said. 'He has made a *détour* on his way back to France on purpose to see me, and he would not like me to go away immediately.'

'Of course you could not think of such a thing,' Jeanne answered, decisively; 'but you will be able to go into Kabylia some other time; it will not be at all too hot for another month at least.'

The Vicomte made a grimace. 'If I do not go with you, Kabylia will have to make its arrangements for doing without me this year,' he said. 'I suppose—I suppose you could not postpone your departure for a day or two?'

'Oh, no; I am afraid not. Léon has made an appointment with Señor Lopez.'

'Then I can only trust to overtaking you before you have finished your tour. I shall start on horseback as soon as my friend leaves, and, as I suppose you will stay a day or two at Fort Napoléon, I may perhaps have the good fortune to find you there—that is, if you do not object to my following you.'

'Not in the least,' replied Jeanne, not very cordially; 'but it will be hardly worth while—will it?'

'If you were going to the Cape of Good Hope, instead of to Fort Napoléon, I should think it worth while to follow you,' said poor Saint-Luc.

Whereupon Jeanne turned impatiently away.

An hour later, she and Barrington were seated opposite to one another in the dilapidated waggonette which Léon used for country journeys. It was an ancient vehicle, with patched cushions and travel-stained leather roof and curtains; but its springs were strong, and it had outlived the jolts and shocks of many an unmetalled road and stony watercourse. Jeanne loved it for association's sake; and Barrington, in his then state of mind, would not have changed it for the car of Aurora.

It is nine years or more since Mr. Barrington was borne swiftly along the dusty road which leads eastward from Algiers, in that shabby old shandrydan—and in nine years, the doctors tell us, our whole outer man has been renewed, so that the being which calls itself I to-day inhabits a changed prison from that which it dwelt in a hundred and eight months ago, and will, if it survive, occupy a hundred and eight months hence. Mental statistics are less easy to arrive at, and it may be that our minds are not as subject to the

inexorable law of change as our bodies. Barrington, at all events, whose views upon more subjects than one have unquestionably become modified by the lapse of nine years, still asserts, in confidential moments, that he looks back upon that drive into Kabylia as the happiest episode in his existence. 'Life,' he says, in that melancholy tone which perfectly prosperous men have a trick of assuming, 'is a dull enough business, take it all in all; but it has its good days here and there.' And then he sighs, and puffs silently at his cigar for a minute or two. 'Old de Fontvieille sat on the box,' he goes on presently, 'and talked to the driver. Young de Mersac had ridden ahead, and she and I were as completely alone together as if we had been upon a desert island. It was a situation in which human nature instinctively shakes itself free of commonplace conventionality. We did not flirt—thank Heaven, we were neither of us so *vulgar* as to think of flirting!—but we talked together as freely and naturally as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.' And then he generally heaves another sigh, and rhapsodises on and on till, patient as one is, one has to remind him that it is long past bedtime.

As (to use a hackneyed illustration) the

traveller looks back upon distant purple mountains, forgetting, as he contemplates their soft beauty, the roughness of the track by which he crossed them, so Barrington recalls the happy bygone days of his Kabylian journey, and ignores the petty annoyances which somewhat marred his enjoyment of it while it lasted. To hear him talk, you would think that the sun had never been too hot, nor the roads too dusty, during that memorable excursion; that good food was obtainable at every halting-place, and that he had never had cause to complain of the accommodation provided for him for the night. Time has blotted out from his mental vision all retrospect of dirt, bad food, and the virulent attacks of the African flea—a most malignant insect—*impiger*, *iracundus*, *inexorabilis*, *acer*—an animal who dies as hard as a rhinoceros, and is scarcely less venomous than a mosquito. He dwells not now upon the horrors of his first night at Bon-Douaou, during which he sat up in bed, through long wakeful hours, doggedly scattering insecticide among his savage assailants, and producing about as much effect thereby as a man slinging stones at an ironclad might do. The place where there was nothing but briny bacon to eat, the place where there was

nothing but a broken-down billiard-table and a rug to sleep upon, and the place where there was nothing to drink, except bad absinthe—all these have faded out of his recollection. But, in truth, these small discomforts were soon forgotten, even at the time.

For when the baking plain was left behind, and the travellers stood upon the windy summit of the Col Ben-Aicha, with Great Kabylia beneath their feet, and the tumbled mass of the Djurdjura mountains, towering, snow-crowned, against a cloudless sky, before them, even M. de Fontvieille —no great enthusiast in respect of scenery—was fain to confess that so magnificent a prospect and such a strong, bracing air were well worth the inconvenience it had cost him to obtain them; while Barrington broke forth into the most exaggerated expressions of eulogy, gladdening thereby the heart of Jeanne, who felt something of the pride of ownership in the beauty of her beloved Algeria.

When Thomas of Ercildoune took his famous ride with the Queen of the Fairies, and reached a region unknown to man, it will be remembered that the fair lady drew rein for a few minutes and indicated to her companion the various paths that

lay before them. There was the thorny way of righteousness and the broad road of iniquity—neither of which have ever been found entirely free from drawbacks by mortals—but besides these, there was a third path.

> O see ye not that bonny road,
> That winds about the fernie brae?
> That is the road to fair Elfland,
> Where thou and I this night maun gae.

And Thomas seems to have offered no objection to his leader's choice.

Even so Barrington, though capable of distinguishing between broad and narrow paths, and their respective goals; capable also—which is perhaps more to the purpose—of forecasting the results of prudence and folly, chose at this time to close his eyes, and wander, with Jeanne, into that fairy-land of which every man gets a glimpse in his time, though few have the good fortune to linger within its precincts as long as did Thomas the Rhymer.

And so there came to him five days of which he will probably never see the like again. Five days of glowing sunshine; five luminous, starlit nights—eighty hours, more or less (making de-

ductions for sleeping time) of unreasoning, unthinking, unmixed happiness—such was Barrington's share of Fairyland—and a very fair share too, as the world goes. He would be puzzled now—and indeed, for that matter, he would have been puzzled a week after the excursion—to give any accurate description of the country between Algiers and Fort Napoléon. The sum of his reminiscences was that, in the dewy mornings and the cool evenings, he drove through a wooded, hilly country with Jeanne; that he rested in the noonday heat at spacious whitewashed caravanserais or small wayside taverns, and talked to Jeanne; that her tall, graceful figure was the first sight he saw in the morning and the last at night; that he never left her side for more than ten minutes at a time; that he discovered some fresh charm in her with each succeeding hour; and that when he arrived at Fort Napoléon, and the limit of his wanderings, he was as completely and irretrievably in love as ever man was.

In truth, the incidents of the journey were well calculated to enhance the mixture of admiration and reverence with which Barrington had regarded Mademoiselle de Mersac from the mo-

ment of his first meeting with her. Her progress through Kabylia was like that of a gracious queen among her subjects. The swarthy Kabyle women, to whom she spoke in their own language, and for the benefit of whose ragged children she had provided herself with a multitude of toys, broke into shrill cries of welcome when they recognised her ; the sparse French colonists, at whose farms she stopped, came out to greet her with smiles upon their careworn faces ; at the caravanserai of the Issers, where some hundreds of Arabs were assembled for the weekly market, the Caïd of the tribe, a stately grey-bearded patriarch, who wore the star of the Legion of Honour upon his white burnous, stepped out from his tent, as she approached, and, bowing profoundly, took her hand and raised it to his forehead ; even the villanous, low-browed, thin-lipped Spanish countenance of Señor Lopez assumed an expression of deprecating amiability when she addressed him ; he faltered in the tremendous lies which, from mere force of habit, he felt constrained to utter about the pedigree of his colts ; his sly little beady eyes dropped before her great grave ones, he listened silently while she pointed out the inconsistencies of his statements, and finally made a far worse bargain

with M. Léon than he had expected or intended to do.

And if anything more had been needed to complete Barrington's subjugation, the want would have been supplied by Jeanne's demeanour towards himself. Up to the time of this memorable journey she had treated him with a perceptible measure of caprice, being kind or cold as the humour took her—sometimes receiving him as an old friend, sometimes as a complete stranger, and even snubbing him without mercy, upon one or two occasions. It was her way to behave so towards all men, and she had not seen fit to exempt Mr. Barrington altogether from the common lot of his fellows. But now—perhaps because she had escaped from the petty trammels and irritations of every-day life, perhaps because the free air of the mountains which she loved disposed her to cast aside formality, or perhaps from causes unacknowledged by herself—her intercourse with the Englishman assumed a wholly new character. She wandered willingly with him into those quaint Kabyle villages which stand each perched upon the apex of a conical hill—villages which took a deal of fighting to capture, and might have to be taken all over again, so Léon

predicted, one fine day; she stood behind him and looked over his shoulder while he dashed off hasty likenesses of such of the natives as he could induce, by means of bribes, to overcome their strong natural aversion to having their portraits taken; she never seemed to weary of his company; and if there was still an occasional touch of condescension in her manner, it is probable that Barrington, feeling as he then did, held such manifestations to be only fitting and natural as coming from her to him.

And then, by degrees, there sprang up between them a kind of natural understanding, an intuitive perception of each other's thoughts and wishes, and a habit of covertly alluding to small matters and small jokes unknown to either of their companions. And sometimes their eyes met for a second, and often an unintelligible smile appeared upon the lips of the one to be instantaneously reflected upon those of the other. All of which things were perceived by the observant M. de Fontvieille, and caused him to remark aloud every night, in the solitude of his own chamber, before going to bed: 'Madame, I was not the instigator of this expedition; on the contrary, I warned you against it. I had no power and no authority to

prevent its consequences, and I wash my hands of them.'

The truth is, that the poor old gentleman was looking forward with some trepidation to an interview with the Duchess which his prophetic soul saw looming in the future.

Fort Napoléon, frowning down from its rocky eminence upon subjugated Kabylia, is the most important fortress of that once turbulent country, and is rather a military post than a town or village. It has, however, a modicum of civilian inhabitants, dwelling in neat little white houses on either side of a broad street, and at the eastern end of the street a small church has been erected. Thither Jeanne betook herself, one evening, at the hour of the Ave Maria, as her custom was. The sun was sinking in the glow of a cloudless sky; the breeze, which had rioted all day among the heights, had died away into a dead calm, and the universal rest and silence was broken only by the ting-ting of the little church-bell—

> Che paia il giorno pianger che si muore.

Jeanne passed in to her devotions, and the heretic Englishman lounged at the door and listened to the slumberous droning of the priest within. After a time the voice ceased, and then

the worshippers—two or three old crones and a couple of black-robed Sisters of Charity—trooped out, and passed away down the sunny street. Then there was unbroken stillness for five minutes; and then the door swung back on its hinges, and Jeanne emerged from the gloom of the church and met the dazzling blaze of the sunset, which streamed full upon her, making her cast her eyes upon the ground.

She paused for a moment upon the threshold. and as she stood there, with her pale face, her drooped eyelids, and a sweet, grave smile upon her lips, Barrington, whose imagination was for ever playing him tricks, mentally likened her to one of Fra Angelico's angels. She did not in reality resemble one of those ethereal beings much more than she did the heathen goddess to whom he had once before compared her; but something of the sanctity of the church seemed to cling about her, and that, together with the tranquillity of the hour, kept Barrington silent for a few minutes after they had walked away side by side. It was not until they had reached the western ramparts, and, leaning over them, were gazing down into purple valleys lying in deep shade beneath the glowing hill-tops, that he opened his lips.

'So we really go back again to-morrow,' he sighed.

'Yes, to-morrow,' she answered, absently.

'Back to civilisation—back to the dull, monotonous world! What a bore it all is! I wish I could stay here for ever!'

'What? You would like to spend the rest of your life at Fort Napoléon?' said Jeanne, with a smile. 'How long would it take you to tire of Kabylia? A week—two weeks? Not perhaps so much.'

'Of what does not one tire in time?' he answered. 'I have tried most things, and have found them all tolerably wearisome in the end. But there is one thing of which I could never tire.'

'And that?'—inquired Jeanne, facing him with raised eyebrows of calm interrogation.

He had been going to say 'Your society,' but somehow he felt ashamed to utter so feeble a commonplace, and substituted for it, rather tamely, 'My friends.'

'Ah! there are many people who tire of them also, after a time,' remarked Jeanne. 'As for me, I have so few friends,' she added, a little sadly.

'I hope you will always think of me as one of those few,' said Barrington.

'You? Oh, yes, if you wish it,' she answered, rather hurriedly. Then, as if desiring to change the subject, 'How quiet everything is!' she exclaimed. 'Quite in the distance I can hear that there is somebody riding up the hill from Tizi-Ouzou; listen!'

Barrington bent his ear forward, and managed just to distinguish the faint ringing of a horse's hoofs upon the road far below. Presently even this scarcely perceptible sound died away, and a universal hush brooded over the earth and air. Then, for a long time, neither of them spoke again—Jeanne because her thoughts were wandering; Barrington because he was half afraid of what he might say if he trusted himself to open his lips.

The sun dipped behind the mountain ridge; a little breeze rose, shivered, and fell, and then the galloping of a horse smote once more loud and clear upon the ears of the listeners. Nearer and nearer it sounded, till at last horse and rider shot out from behind a shoulder of rock directly beneath them; showed, for a moment, huge and black, against the ruddy sky; and then, clattering

under the arched gateway of the town, disappeared.

'It is M. de Saint-Luc!' ejaculated Jeanne, in a tone of some dismay.

And Barrington, beneath his breath, muttered 'Hang him!' with most heartfelt emphasis.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH MR. BARRINGTON LOSES HIS TEMPER.

Love, which set Trojans and Greeks by the ears of old, involving pious Æneas and many-counselled Ulysses in a peck of troubles—which led Roman Antony to his death—which was nearly becoming the ruin of David, King of Israel—and which, in all ages, has been the cause of many a wise man's doing many a foolish thing—love it was that had led Saint-Luc—a person noted for his tact and good sense—into the stupid blunder of thrusting himself into the company of four people who were perfectly happy together without him.

The very thought, indeed, which in his normal state of mind would have kept him from tacking himself on to the party—namely, a strong suspicion that he was not wanted—had now exercised a directly opposite influence upon him. A perpetual vision of Jeanne and Mr. Barrington wandering together in wild Kabylian solitudes

had so beset him by day, and driven sleep from his pillow by night, ever since he had found himself alone in Algiers, that at last he could bear it no longer, and, feeling that reality could have no pangs in store for him more bitter than those of imagination, he packed what clothes he required into a small valise, strapped it on to the front of his saddle, and galloped off on the track of the wanderers. And so, having done the distance in a much shorter time than a prudent man would have allowed, he reached Fort Napoléon at length, and earned a chill welcome for himself and a pair of puffy fore-legs for his horse.

M. de Fontvieille, who happened to be standing at the door of the little inn, enjoying the evening air, pulled a wry face when he recognised the impetuous horseman who drew rein beside him.

'What—is it you, M. le Vicomte?' he cried, in anything but a joyous tone.

Saint-Luc did not seem to notice any want of cordiality in his reception. He swung himself out of the saddle, and held out his hand, exclaiming—

'What good fortune that I find you still here!'

'How, good fortune? I don't understand you,' returned the old gentleman rather testily. 'Of course we are here. Where else should we be?'

'I feared you might have altered your route and gone to Dellys, or somewhere else,' answered Saint-Luc, rather abashed. 'I thought,' he continued apologetically, 'that as I was unable to start with you, I might venture to follow as soon as I found myself free; so I set out from Algiers yesterday morning—and here I am.'

'So I perceive,' grunted M. de Fontvieille, not at all mollified; 'and charmed as I am to see you, monsieur, I can only regret that you should have put yourself to so much inconvenience, for I fear you will have had your ride for your pains. We start on our return journey early to-morrow morning, Heaven be praised! I confess that years have deprived me of all taste for rough travelling.'

'To-morrow morning!' echoed Saint-Luc, rather blankly. 'H'm!—nothing can be more certain than that my horse will not be in a state to leave the stable for another four-and-twenty hours at least. But I can easily get him sent back from here in a day or two,' he added,

brightening. 'Perhaps you would kindly allow me to take a seat in your carriage. Or would that incommode you too much?'

Poor M. de Fontvieille was not in the best of tempers. As he had said, he was no longer of an age to enjoy roughing it, and any pleasure he might have derived from the contemplation of fine scenery had been completely neutralised of late by the discovery of the growing intimacy between Jeanne and the Englishman. Moveover, he had been kept waiting more than half an hour for his dinner, and the inopportune appearance of Saint-Luc was, at this especial moment, almost too much for him. The carriage does not belong to me,' he replied crossly; 'but I dare say Léon will have no objection to your taking a place in it; it is made to hold six people at a pinch, I believe. For myself, I have hitherto sat on the box, and I intend to do so for the remainder of the trip. I do not like the box-seat; it is exposed to the sun and the dust, and I am compelled to lean back upon an iron rail which eats into my spine; but I prefer that to making one of three inside. It is you who will occupy that enviable position to-morrow, monsieur.'

This was not very pleasant. Saint-Luc began

to wish that he had remained in Algiers. But while he was doubting what reply to make, a friendly slap on his shoulder made him turn round with a start, and he found himself face to face with Léon.

'So you have come at last!' cried that innocent young man. 'We had quite given up all hope of you. Why did you not start sooner?'

'I could not get away,' the poor Vicomte answered ruefully; 'and now I am not sure whether I shall do well to return with you. M. de Fontvieille has just been telling me that I shall be *de trop* in the carriage; and I cannot take my horse out to-morrow.'

'*De trop*?—nonsense—how can you be *de trop*? M. de Fontvieille was joking,' said Léon rather confusedly; for he understood what the old gentleman had meant, and wondered how he could have been so foolish as to stir up unnecessary jealousies. He (Léon) would never have committed such a *gaucherie*. By way of repairing the mischief, and making things comfortable, he went on to say that, so far from making an unwelcome addition to the party, Saint-Luc's arrival would be an immense comfort to them all—'especially to Jeanne, who must be getting tired

of Mr. Barrington by this time, charming as he is. I have had business in one place and another, which has forced me to perform nearly the whole journey in solitude; and so, of course, the duty of entertaining the stranger has fallen upon Jeanne, though in reality he is rather my friend than hers. It will be a pleasant change for her to have some one else to talk to during the long drive home.'

'You think so?' said Saint-Luc with a faint smile. 'But that, after all, is hardly the question. M. de Fontvieille only pointed out to me that three is an awkward number—and I quite agree with him.'

Pierre might ride my horse, and then we could all go in the carriage together,' suggested the accommodating Léon. And then Barrington and Jeanne came in sight, strolling up the street in the twilight as leisurely as if three hungry men were not waiting dinner for them.

Barrington, distinguishing the little silent group at the inn-door, guessed at once that they had been talking about him. M. de Fontvieille fidgeted in his cane chair, and glanced sharply from him to Jeanne and from Jeanne back to him again. Léon looked embarrassed, and Saint-Luc, leaning

against the door-post with folded arms and eyes gloomily riveted upon the ground, remained immovable as a statue. And now, for the first time, Barrington realised with a transient jealous twinge what a singularly handsome man his rival was. An oval face, an olive complexion, a heavy black moustache, a small head well set on to a pair of broad shoulders, a tall, lithe, muscular frame—what more could anyone desire in the shape of manly beauty? Saint-Luc wore a sun-helmet, tightly fitting cords, and high riding-boots, and, flung back from his shoulders, was the short *caban* or white, hooded cloak which is worn by officers in Algeria when on up-country duty, and is also in much favour among such civilians as have an eye for effect. It is of no earthly use, but it is unquestionably a picturesque and becoming garment. Barrington was neither tall nor specially good-looking. He wore, on the present occasion, a tweed suit, not in its first freshness, a wide-awake hat, and a puggaree soiled with a week's dust. 'Why didn't I get one of those confounded sun-helmets?' he thought; and then inwardly laughed a little at his own vanity. Was Jeanne the woman to draw comparisons between sun-helmets and wide-awakes?

A few minutes later the whole party were seated at a round table in the low-roofed *salle-à-manger*, discussing what by courtesy was called their dinner by the light of an evil-smelling paraffin lamp. They had not noticed the offensiveness of the oil before, but they all remarked upon it now; they discovered, too, that the food was bad, and the wine execrable, and the tablecloth dirty. Conversation flagged somewhat, nor did anyone venture upon a foolish little joke, such as had been wont of late to crop up about this hour. Jeanne was cold, stately, and reserved —the Jeanne of the Campagne de Mersac in her least expansive moments—a very different person from the girl who had driven with Barrington over the Col Ben-Aïcha and the lowlands of the Issers. And so one, at least, of the company was there and then summarily ejected from Fairyland, and falling roughly upon hard, practical earth, lost his temper a little in the process. That is the worst of aërial castle-building: one touch from a clumsy, unconscious, not malevolent hand, and away goes the whole flimsy fabric, leaving no trace behind it. The poor stupid paw that has swept it into space has only forestalled time a little, and ought not, perhaps, to be blamed, but it

can hardly expect to escape some momentary hatred. Barrington, for whom all rough places had been carefully made smooth from his childhood up, resented a stroke of bad luck like a personal affront, and was always angry with anyone who hurt him, whether intentionally or not. He was very angry now with Saint-Luc, which was perhaps pardonable; he was angry also with Léon and M. de Fontvieille, which was hardly fair; and lastly, he was angry with Jeanne for not devoting her whole attention to him, which was most unjust. At his time of life he ought to have known better than to show his annoyance; but he did not. He sulked openly, returned curt answers when he was addressed, contradicted Saint-Luc half-a-dozen times in an entirely uncalled-for manner, and generally did his best to render an uncomfortable situation worse than it need have been.

Everybody was thankful when the dreary meal was at an end; and the old commandant of the place happening to drop in at that moment, and challenging M. de Fontvieille to a game of dominoes, Jeanne gladly seized the opportunity to propose to the others that they should go outside into the cool evening air. 'It is

impossible to breathe in this atmosphere,' she said; 'I am stifling.'

So they all passed from the glare and heat of the room, through the doorway, where the landlord and a few of his friends were chatting over their cigarettes, and out into the solemn starlight; Jeanne first, then Saint-Luc, then Léon, Barrington bringing up the rear.

The latter was still at loggerheads with the world. He wanted to walk with Jeanne, but he did not choose to make the first advance, and loitered behind, thinking that she would perhaps make some sign to him to join her. As a matter of course she did no such thing. She gave him his chance by standing for a minute before the inn to wrap the light burnous which she had brought out with her about her shoulders; but as he did not take advantage of it, she marched away up the street at a steady pace without casting a glance behind her, and Saint-Luc strode by her side. Barrington made no effort to follow them. He lighted a cigar with much deliberation, stuck his hands into his pockets, and strolled across the road to a bench, upon which he seated himself. Léon, after a moment of hesitation, followed his example, remarking

blandly as he did so: 'It is a charming night for a walk.'

'So your sister and M. de Saint-Luc appear to think. I can't understand how people can enjoy posting off at the rate of five miles an hour directly they have swallowed their dinner,' remarked Barrington.

'Why, you have walked after dinner every night yourself till this evening,' cried Léon innocently.

Barrington made no reply. He was gazing after two figures which were rapidly diminishing into the gloom. They vanished for a second under the deep shadow of some acacia trees; then they emerged, and he caught a glimpse of the shimmer of Jeanne's burnous and Saint-Luc's short white cloak fluttering in the night breeze; then the intervening angle of a house shut them out again, and they were gone.

Barrington sighed, and puffed silently at his cigar. After all, he was only playing at being jealous; he was not really afraid of the handsome Vicomte; he was only chagrined that his happy dream should have been so rudely dispelled; and, moreover, if he had analysed his feelings, he would have found that no small part of his annoy-

ance was due to the first stirring in his mind of that disquieting question which must, sooner or later, arise out of love-making—how is it to end? He had dodged out of the way of this pertinacious little note of interrogation; he had tried to stifle it, and pretended to ignore it, but, spite of all he could do, there it was; and now what could be expected but that it should grow larger and larger and daily more obtrusive till it got a plain answer out of its victim? As yet, however, Barrington had not begun to disturb himself with reference to the future, and was conscious only of a vague uneasiness, together with a strong present desire to arise up and follow Jeanne and Saint-Luc into the darkness. But as such a proceeding would involve loss of dignity, he decided to resist his inclinations and remain where he was. 'She will come back presently,' he thought, 'and then I can apologise for having been surly at dinner. I believe I did make myself rather unpleasant, now I come to think of it.'

Ten minutes passed slowly away, while Léon discoursed about the conquest of Kabylia and wasted some interesting anecdotes upon a preoccupied hearer; but Jeanne did not return. There was a stir and a scraping of chairs in the

inn over the way; M. le Commandant, wrapped in his military cloak, stepped out into the street and strode away with ringing spurs; a light appeared in M. de Fontvieille's bed-room and ere long was extinguished. That unworthy chaperon had gone to bed leaving his charge to roam about with young men under the stars. The church-clock struck the half-hour, and Barrington began to fidget. Léon had got out of the regions of history now, and was discussing the respective merits of military and civil government in Algeria—'*Cercles militaires*'—'*Bureaux Arabes*'—'two hundred thousand Europeans against two millions and a half of *indigènes*'—'the necessity of keeping an active force always before the eyes of half-civilised races.' Disjointed fragments of Léon's harangue fell meaningless upon Barrington's inattentive ears, and he threw in a 'Yes' or a 'No,' or an 'Exactly so,' as occasion appeared to require.

'Your sister is taking a very long walk,' he said at length, anxiety getting the better of self-respect.

'Not longer than usual, is she? it is so warm and fine to-night. Well, you see these vile Republicans—a set of beggarly ruffians whose

only policy is to uproot every existing institution, in order that they may have a chance of picking up something when there is a scramble for fresh places—are agitating for a civil government. They complain of this and that, and point to abuses here and there; and abuses there are, sure enough, but what would you have? Are civilians likely to be honester men than soldiers? For my part, I believe that officials of all classes will invariably fill their pockets out of the public exchequer, whenever they see an opportunity of doing so without being found in the act. No, no; what we want is security—security for our lives, security for our property.'

'Quite right, I'm sure. Security, as you say, is the essential thing, and without security, you know—why, where are you, you know? Your sister and M. de Saint-Luc have been away exactly three-quarters of an hour. Is it possible that they can have lost their way?'

'Quite impossible. The gates of the town are shut, and they cannot be very far away from us at this moment. What I maintain is that the Arab will never understand nor fear a ruler in a black coat. The Governor-General ought always to be a man who is ready to enforce

obedience at the head of an army, if need be, and those who imagine that there will be no more fighting in Algeria are very much mistaken. This idea of a Civil Governor is only the first step in a policy which must end in disaster. The same men who clamour for a reformed system of rule, declare that we have many more regiments in the country than are necessary for our protection. If they carry out their programme, the Algerian forces will be gradually reduced till, some fine morning, we shall wake to find that the Arabs have risen and the whole colony is in a blaze. We poor farmers shall lose our property; hundreds of unfortunate Europeans will be massacred, and—oh, here is Jeanne.'

'When is the massacre to take place, Léon?' asked that young lady, appearing suddenly out of the gloom, followed by M. de Saint-Luc. 'More people die of fever than of massacre in this country, Mr. Barrington, and the very best way to catch a fever is to sit out at night when the dews are falling. For Léon it does not matter, he is acclimatised; but he ought to have made you walk about.'

'I meant to have walked, but I was waiting for you. I could not tell that you would be such

a very long time away,' said Barrington, in a slightly aggrieved tone.

'I am sorry that you should have been kept waiting,' she answered, rather coldly; 'and now it is too late to think of anything but bed. I am so tired that I think I will bid you all good-night at once.'

She turned as she spoke, and, crossing the road, vanished into the inn, and Barrington, being out of temper with the world generally and M. de Saint-Luc particularly, threw away the end of his cigar and announced that he was going to bed too.

'We will all go to bed; we shall have to start early to-morrow morning,' said Léon; but Saint-Luc laid his hand upon the young man's arm, saying, 'Wait for another quarter of an hour; I want to have a chat with you'—so Barrington entered the house alone.

Saint-Luc linked his arm within that of his young friend, led him back to the bench which the Englishman had just vacated, and, throwing himself down upon it, sighed out: 'Well, it is all over! She will have nothing to say to me.'

Léon could not pretend to misunderstand his meaning. He was sincerely sorry to hear such bad news, for he liked Saint-Luc, and would

gladly have welcomed him as a brother-in-law, and, moreover, the Duchess and M. de Fontvieille had taken a great deal of trouble lately to convince him of the desirability of his sister's speedy marriage. At the same time experience had taught him that Jeanne always knew her own mind, and that when she said no, she meant no; and this knowledge made it difficult for him to find any consolatory reply for the benefit of the luckless wooer. At length, however, he asked—'Are you quite sure of that?' which was perhaps the best thing he could have said under the circumstances.

'It is not her fault if I am not,' returned Saint-Luc, with a dreary laugh. 'She told me she could no more marry me than M. de Fontvieille.'

'That,' said Léon, feeling very uncomfortable, and wishing most heartily that his friend could have chosen some other confidant—'that is, of course, only a way of speaking. Jeanne often expresses herself strongly; but she does not always mean quite all that she says, and I am sure that she did not intend to be unkind or rude to you.'

'She was neither the one nor the other; on the contrary, she was most kind. I think she has not quite understood me till now. She thought I

was seeking a *mariage de convenance*, whereas—but it does not much signify. No one could have been more gentle and compassionate than she was, but that does not alter the fact that she has broken my heart. Do not laugh, Léon. A year ago I no more believed in broken hearts than you do; but when a man suffers such pain as I suffer, he must cease to be a sceptic, whether he will or no. I know what you would say—"*On ne meurt pas de cette maladie-là*"—but that is just what makes it a more infernal torture than any physical one. *Tenez*! if it were not that I dread causing annoyance to others, I would put a pistol to my head this very night. Bon Dieu! what is this wretched thing called life that a man should care to keep it in his body? What has my life been? The life of a dog—what do I say—of a lap-dog—a useless, dull, over-fed brute. Looking back upon past years, I connot recall a single day or a single hour that I would choose to live over again: it is all idleness, and satiety, and disgust. I don't know how far I have been to blame; there must be some atom of good in me, or I should not so abhor myself; but I suppose it has not had force to struggle against the bad side of my nature. Before I met your sister I looked forward to

dawdling through the rest of my life in a resigned, discontented sort of way. I knew I should never be of the smallest good to myself or anybody else in the world, and I did not much care ; but then I saw her, and fell in love with her (God knows why or wherefore—we wretched humans have no control over our fate), and that changed everything. I thought I might possibly become—I won't say worthy of her—but as worthy as a man with my past could be. I had dreams and projects, all of which have been blown into space by one word, so that I need not trouble you with them. Ah, why did I ever see her? Why was I not left in my brutish indifference, if I was to spend all the rest of my life in hopelessness and solitude? If I believed in the Christian religion—which I do not, unfortunately ; the world that I have lived in has honestly rejected that faith, finding it impossible to make it fit in with its own system of morality—I say, if I were a Christian, I would turn Trappist. It is a kind of suicide which the Church, knowing that some loophole out of the world must be left open for desperate men, permits, and is even kind enough to reward with a palm and a crown, instead of with hell-fire. But that door is closed to me. I have no faith in

the palm or the crown, and should not know what to do with them when I had got them. There remains the pistol. I shall not use it just yet, for reasons that you may surmise; but before many months are over, I hope to rid society of one of its most useless members.'

So poor Saint-Luc raved on, pacing to and fro in the dust and throwing his arms about as Frenchmen will do when they are in despair, or fancy themselves so. We English are a less demonstrative race; still one has heard a deal of nonsense talked by one's own compatriots under similar circumstances. The difficulty is to know what to say by way of comfort to a man who has just been refused. To tell him that he will get over it in time may be true, but savours of brutality, while encouragement to make another attempt may only lead him on to a second repulse. Practically, however, I believe that everybody does adopt the latter alternative. Léon, at all events, did so upon the present occasion.

'I think you would be wrong to take Jeanne's decision as final,' he said, as soon as he could get a hearing. 'You have been a little abrupt with her, and then, too, it seems to me that you have not chosen a very appropriate occasion.'

'Do you seriously mean to tell me,' broke in Saint-Luc, 'that it would have made the slightest difference if I had spoken last week, or had put off doing so till next? Bah! I found myself alone with her—a thing which does not happen to me every day, let me remind you—I was tired of suspense, and I said to myself that I would know the worst—*Voilà!*'

'That is just it. You made up your mind that you would know the worst, and you let her see that you expected the worst, and therefore you failed. All women are the same; throw yourself at their feet, and they will trample upon you; face them boldly, and they will yield,' said Léon, whose youthful assumption of knowledge of a subject which the wisest of men have failed to fathom will perhaps be pardoned by those who remember that he was really sorry for his friend, and was doing what in him lay to console the afflicted one. 'I grant you that Jeanne is not like other girls,' continued this successful student of character; 'her education and position are different from those of other girls—else you could hardly have spoken to her as you have done this evening—but for all that, she is a woman, and women require humouring. The fact is that you

have addressed yourself to her at the wrong moment.'

'The wrong moment!' interrupted Saint-Luc —'why the wrong moment? Because that Englishman is here? Is there ever a moment when he is not with her? My good Léon, I am as much in love as it is possible to be, but I am not therefore blind. It is sufficiently evident to me that your sister will marry the Englishman, against whom I have nothing to say. If he be not more worthy of her than I, he must be a far worse man than I take him for. Whether he loves her as devotedly as I do, is another question.'

'Jeanne marry Mr. Barrington? Absurd!' cried Léon. 'Neither M. de Fontvieille, nor the Duchess, nor I, would ever consent to her becoming the wife of a foreigner and a Protestant'

'But I thought she was free to marry whom she pleased?'

'Well, yes, so she is, in a certain sense; but of course she would never think of disregarding the wishes of—of all her friends. Besides, she would never have been so friendly with Mr. Barrington if she had had an idea of such an end to this intimacy. No, no. my friend; believe me,

there is nothing of that kind. Try again in a month's time; be less diffident, and you will very likely be successful. I think Jeanne knows that all our sympathies are with you.'

'Will you speak to her on the subject?' asked Saint-Luc, who was only too willing to be persuaded into hope, against his own judgment.

'Why, no,' answered Léon, hesitatingly; 'I don't think I could quite do that; she would not like it. You see, she is a little older than I am, and she has always been accustomed to take the lead, and she is not precisely one of those people whom one can interfere with easily, and—and—in point of fact, I really doubt whether my speaking would not do more harm than good. If I am to be quite candid with you, I must confess that neither I nor anybody else has much authority over Jeanne; but she is so good and so self-sacrificing that she would do a great deal to please any one of us, and——'

'I don't wish her to sacrifice herself,' interrupted Saint-Luc.

'I express myself badly. What I meant to say was that our wishes would have a good deal of weight with her. As I told you just now, I believe she knows what our wishes are, and we

will try to make them more apparent. I don't see that we can do anything more for you.'

'I suppose not,' sighed Saint-Luc. 'I will try again then; it is a forlorn hope, but it is better than nothing. Thank you for your sympathy. Now you are dying to get to sleep, and I will not keep you up any longer. Good-night.'

So Léon went to his bed, and Saint-Luc roamed about the silent town till daylight, mentally balancing himself against Barrington, and deriving no encouragement from the process.

It is perhaps needless to add that he did not occupy the vacant seat in the waggonette on the following day.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH MR. BARRINGTON WINS A GAME OF BILLIARDS.

One of the most grievous burdens attaching to royal birth must be, one would think, the impossibility of getting from one country to another without well-meant but tedious demonstrations of loyalty and respect. An unfortunate emperor, king, or prince lands from the steamer in which, perhaps, he has been wofully sea-sick, or steps out of his special train, dirty and weary, and there, upon the platform, stands his worship the mayor, in furred gown and gold chain, with an attendant body of aldermen and town-councillors, and proceeds to entertain the illustrious traveller with a loyal and long-winded address of welcome. The poor royal personage knows perfectly well the stereotyped, meaningless phrases which are about to be hurled at him, and knows also the terms in which it will be expected he should reply thereto.

The whole business must be to him a monstrous unnecessary bore; still, it has to be gone through, and he goes through it as cheerfully as may be. If, however, he be a shifty royal personage, and can manage to get his luggage moved with extra rapidity, there is a reasonable mode of escape open to him. It may be announced that his Majesty, or his Royal Highness, as the case may be, is compelled to proceed on his journey with all possible despatch, and must deny himself the pleasure of hearing or delivering speeches on his way; the loyal address, therefore, will be 'taken as read.' So the illuminated parchment is hastily shoved in at the carriage window, the exalted creature inside advances, bows and smiles with such affability as nature has granted to him, and is presently whisked away in a manner satisfactory, it is to be hoped, both to himself and others.

If only certain days of our life, the net result of which can be easily foretold—days of mere barren vexation and weariness of the flesh—could be thus summarily dismissed, and taken as lived, how thankful some of us would be! In real life, unfortunately, there is no stealing a march upon Time: we must take the rough with the smooth, and all we have to consider is how to swallow

measureless tedium with a minimum of yawns; but when it comes to be a question of fiction, to which, it may be presumed, nobody resorts unless with some faint expectation of amusement, nature revolts against dulness, and nimbly skips over the prosy passages. Those prosy passages need never be written at all, and much labour might be spared to writer as well as reader could the former but guess when he is about to become wearisome; but that, no doubt, is past hoping for. Of one thing, however, every narrator may be sure—that when, in the course of his story, he feels disposed to dwell upon any particular subject, he is getting upon dangerous ground, and had best quit that subject without further delay. The present writer, being conscious of an inclination to linger among the sunny valleys and breezy heights of Kabylia, now, therefore, resolutely turns away from that pleasant land, and shutting out his background of mountains and blue sky, narrows the limits of his stage to the four walls of a heated and not over well-lighted billiard-room.

It is a long, low-roofed room, occupying the whole entresol above one of the principal cafés of Algiers, and containing several tables. At one of

these Barrington and a friend, picked up at the Hotel d'Orient, are hard at work in their shirt-sleeves, endeavouring, not very successfully, to master the science of the cannon game, while at a more distant one, M. de Saint-Luc, with pale face and downcast mien, is absently knocking the balls about, pausing every now and again to emit a half-smothered sigh. Léon, outstretched upon a sofa, with a cigarette in his mouth and a tall glass of vermouth and water on a table at his side, contemplates with the serene smile of a man who has dined well, the blue smoke clouds that slowly drift away from him; and, on the opposite side of the room, a diminutive, close-cropped waiter, worn out by the labour and heat of the day, is snatching a well-earned snooze, perched on a high stool, on whose slippery summit he perilously sways and lurches. From the café beneath rises a confused hubbub, a clinking of glasses, a clattering of dominoes, a roar of excited voices, such as in England would convey the idea of nothing less than an imminent free-fight, but here means only that a few good bourgeois and line-officers are enjoying a quiet evening after their habitual manner; in the street below a shrill-voiced boy is shouting, '*Moniteur d'Algérie*, journal du soir!

Achetez le *Moniteur d'Algérie*!' and from time to time, when the tumult abates for a second or two, the monotonous thrum, thrum, thrum of a guitar can be heard faintly rising from a Moorish café down by the water-side.

Here, in the billiard-room, there is silence unbroken save by the click of the balls and the occasional execrations of Mr. Barrington's friend, who plays a very fair game at the club at home, and is surprised and disgusted to find how little mastery he has over foreign balls and cues.

'Never saw such a beastly game in my life!' he exclaims wrathfully, throwing himself down upon a chair. 'Might as well play with footballs and barge-poles, by Jove! I'll trouble you for the tip of that cue! Just look at it, will you! Why, it's a couple of inches broad.'

'Ah, it's a game you have to get accustomed to,' remarks Barrington, scoring rather neatly; 'but when you understand it, it's less flukey than ours, and I really think there is more play in it.'

'Don't see any play in it at all,' growls the other; and then there is another long period of silence. The little waiter, with head thrown back and open mouth, begins to snore, and the clock in the tower of the great mosque chimes half-past ten. Pre-

sently Saint-Luc lays down his cue, and strolls dejectedly towards the sofa upon which Léon's long body is extended.

'Léon,' says he, in a sepulchral voice, 'when did you last have an earthquake here?'

'An earthquake? Oh, I hardly remember. We have a few slight shocks every year, but nobody ever thinks anything of them. Once, I remember, there was a great alarm in the middle of the night, and a good many people rushed out into the streets in very scanty apparel, and one silly old woman jumped out of window and broke her leg. But, after all, there was no damage done. Why do you ask?'

'Because I am quite convinced that we are going to have an earthquake to-night. I have never in my life felt in such low spirits as I do at this moment, and I have a sort of unaccountable sensation of dread, which, I take it, must mean that the earth is about to open and swallow me up. Not that that would be such a great misfortune after all.'

'Bah! It is a hot evening, and you are tired and out of sorts, as anyone would be who had spent three days all by himself at Fort Napoléon and then ridden back upon a lame horse. Come

and have a game of billiards, and let us think no more about earthquakes. For my part, I can assure you that, whatever your wishes may be, I should dislike nothing more than being pounded to death by a falling house; and if I thought there was the slightest danger of such a thing happening, I should be out of this room in another moment. Come and play.'

Saint-Luc drops into a chair and shakes his head. 'I cannot play billiards to-night,' he says: 'I should not be able to make a single stroke. Ah, Léon, I have my own good reasons for being miserable, as you know; and I suppose there is no chance of an earthquake, or why should I alone be affected by it? You seem in excellent spirits. I saw you driving with that de Trémonville woman to-day, and she gave you a rose, and you blushed, and stuck it in your button-hole, you foolish boy. Is that why you lie smiling there like a young god on Olympus? Don't be angry; we men are all made fools of by women; we can't escape our destiny, and would not, perhaps, if we could. Imagine yourself in paradise while you can—that is the truest wisdom. That tumbler at your elbow contains nothing but bitter vermouth and half-tepid water, but if you can bring your-

self to quaff it under the impression that it is nectar, why it *is* nectar as far as you are concerned. Some day you will discover that Madame de Trémonville is—well, is a different person from what you now think her to be; but so long as you can keep your illusions, why not do so? That Englishman looks happy too. Did he drive back with her? But of course he did.'

'Well, yes; but M. de Fontvieille also took a seat inside the carriage. I heard Jeanne ask him to do so.'

'You did? She asked him to take a seat inside?' cried Saint-Luc eagerly. 'I wonder what made her do that.'

'How can I tell? She was tired of Mr. Barrington very likely. It seemed to me that they were not quite such good friends after you appeared as they had been before. Believe me, *mon cher*, you have no cause for jealousy. Mr. Barrington must return to England very soon now, and then——'

'Ah, then!'

Bang! Bang! from the further end of the room. Barrington's friend, in a frantic effort to 'screw,' has driven his cue through the cloth, and sent one of the balls spinning off the table. The

little waiter, rudely awakened from his slumbers, loses his balance, falls from his perch with a loud crash, and then, picking himself up, and immediately recovering his presence of mind, pipes out

'*C'est cinquante francs le premier accroc, messieurs.*'

'Oh, oh! I like that!' cries the delinquent, indignantly. 'Cinquante francs—rubbish! Look here, you little beggar! Regardez ici—et là—et là,' pointing to the traces of several previous injuries to the cloth. 'Coupé all over the place, you know. Je paierai cinq francs, and not another centime—so you needn't say any more about it.'

The waiter shrugs his shoulders doubtfully, and says he will consult the 'patron;' and peace being restored, Barrington resumes his cue, and, adroitly drawing the balls into a corner, finishes the game with a break of ten.

The defeated player paid his stake, settled with the waiter, and after making some brief but trenchant observations upon the game of French billiards, took himself off. Then Barrington, who was in high good humour, both because he had won his game and on account of other reasons,

strolled across the room and poked Léon in the ribs with his cue.

'Well, de Mersac,' said he, 'what have you been doing with yourself all day? I was at your house this afternoon, and thought I should have seen you there. How do you do, M. de Saint-Luc? You have just come back from Fort Napoléon, I suppose?'

Old Mr. Ashley, whose property adjoins Barrington's more extensive one, and who has always lived upon the best of terms with his neighbour, has been heard to say that the latter would be one of the pleasantest-mannered men in England if only he could get out of the habit of talking to others as though he were the Prince of Wales; and, indeed, it is true that there is a certain prosperous affability in the demeanour of this fortunate gentleman which men who are out of luck or out of temper sometimes find it hard to bear. Saint-Luc was too well-bred to answer his rival otherwise than politely; but if he could have followed the bent of his own inclinations, and reverted to the customs of a primitive state of society, he would then and there have arisen and pommelled him soundly. That the man should look so disgustingly contented and happy was, perhaps, not

his fault; but that allusion to Fort Napoléon might surely have been spared.

Then there was an interval of silence, after which Léon swung his long legs off the sofa, stretched himself, yawned, and said he thought he would go and look in at the club.

'I am going home to bed; and if you are wise you will follow my example,' observed Barrington, who knew very well what 'looking in at the club' meant.

'Ah, but I am not wise,' rejoined Léon, rather tartly; for, in common with the rest of humanity, he disliked nothing so much as good advice.

He added, 'You are coming, are you not, Saint-Luc?'

The Vicomte fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and drew out a handful of coins and notes, which he proceeded to count. 'Yes,' he answered, when he had finished his sum; 'I find I have got three hundred francs about me. That much I am prepared to lose, but I shall retire as soon as my pockets are empty.'

'And I,' observed Léon, 'have got exactly fifty-five francs fifty centimes; and I have no intention of retiring before I am sleepy.'

'Then I can only hope, for your sake, that you will be sleepy soon,' said Barrington, putting on his hat. 'Good-night, monsieur. Good-night, de Mersac. I daresay I shall see you to-morrow.'

'Virtue has spread her wings and flown,' remarked Saint-Luc, as the swing door closed behind the Englishman. 'You are now alone with Vice, as fitly represented in my humble person. I beg you to observe, however, that I decline the additional *rôle* of Temptation—I will even take upon myself to say that, much as I enjoy your society, I should prefer to say good-night now.'

'Why?' asked Léon, rather affronted.

'Firstly, because they are playing lansquenet at the club to-night, and lansquenet is, of all games that I know, the one at which large sums are most easily lost. Secondly, because there is no luck in the air to-night. Thirdly, because you have not got enough money in your pockets. I have three hundred francs, the loss of which will sober me. You will lose what you have in a few minutes, after which you will take to paper, and become reckless. Also, your head is not so cool as mine to start with.'

Looked upon as a deterrent, the observation was scarcely a happy one. Nobody—above all,

no young man—likes to be told that his head is not cool; nor is it flattering to be cautioned against the seductive nature of any amusement by a man who is himself about to engage in it.

'You talk as if I were a baby,' Léon answered in a tone of some annoyance. 'I have played lansquenet before now, and I am not such a fool as not to know when to stop.'

Saint-Luc shrugged his shoulders. 'I have warned you,' said he; 'I could do no more. I hope you will recollect that to-morrow morning when you wake up with a headache, and try to calculate the amount of your losses. Probably, however, you will blame me—and so will others. That will be nothing more than my usual luck.'

'I shall do nothing of the sort,' answered Léon; 'and I don't know whom you mean by others. When I lose my money, I generally keep the fact to myself.'

'Do you?' said Saint-Luc. 'I have never been able to achieve such reticence. But it does not much matter. Things can hardly be much worse with me than they are already. Shall we go?'

Léon understood it all, and was not best pleased. Jeanne had been the kindest of sisters

to him, and he had a reverence and respect for her rather filial than fraternal; still few sons can bear with equanimity the idea that their mother has requested a stranger to keep them out of mischief, and Léon, as he held open the door for his friend to pass out, said to himself that the time had come for him to shake off feminine rule.

The two men descended the stairs together in silence, and a few steps brought them to the door of the club, which occupied the first floor of a large corner house. The room which they presently entered was a lofty and spacious one, lighted by a big crystal chandelier, and furnished with a multiplicity of easy chairs. In some of these a few members were dozing; a little knot of idlers were smoking on the balcony, and at the further end of the room some eight or ten men, mostly officers in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, were congregated round a card-table. One of the latter wheeled round as the newcomers approached, and beckoned to them.

'Come and bring us a change of luck,' he cried. 'There never was such a dull game as this since the world began! Would you believe that we have been playing for three quarters of

an hour, and that nobody has lost a sou except myself, who am minus three napoleons.'

'I have lost five,' said another man, in a rather aggrieved tone.

'And ought to have lost five hundred,' retorted the first speaker. 'What is the use of playing with a man like you, who always make a point of throwing good money after bad, if nobody is ever to get a deal? I don't think any single dealer has had more than two turns.'

'Be comforted, de Monceaux,' said Saint-Luc, seating himself on the left hand of the grumbler. 'I have brought three hundred francs with me for the express purpose of losing them, and perhaps some share of the plunder may find its way into your pocket.'

'Not if you sit there,' rejoined the other. 'Your stake will be covered three times over before I get a chance of putting anything on. If you think you are going to have bad luck, for Heaven's sake seat yourself above ins ead of below me.'

But Léon had taken the chair next to that which Saint-Luc now occupied, and the kind-hearted Vicomte thought it might be for the

young man's benefit that he should have a mentor at his elbow, so he shook his head.

'It is hardly worth while to change places now,' he said. 'But we are interrupting the game. Whose deal is it?'

'It is mine, I believe,' answered de Monceaux; 'but I have no confidence in these cards. I propose that we have fresh ones, and begin over again.'

So two new packs were brought, and being dealt round, the lowest card fell to Saint-Luc, who thus became dealer, much to the disgust of his neighbour.

'Is that what you call bad luck?' exclaimed that ill-used person, indignantly. 'I might have known how it would be! And now I will lay a hundred francs to fifty that you win six times, provided you leave the stake up.'

Saint-Luc took the bet, laid a napoleon on the table as his stake, and began to deal.

CHAPTER XII.

LANSQUENET.

Most people, probably, are acquainted with the rules of lansquenet; but, for the benefit of those who are not, a short explanation shall be given—the more willingly as the game is one of an engaging simplicity. The dealer, after laying down a stake, the amount of which is left to his option, turns up the first two cards of the pack, one for himself and one for the table; he then proceeds to deal out the cards till one of the same number as either of those displayed appears. Should the table win, he loses his stake and the deal passes; but if his own card prove successful, he may either pocket his winnings and surrender his deal to the next player, or leave both winnings and stake up, and continue. The stake may be covered by one or more of the players, the left-hand neighbour of the dealer having the first choice. In the present instance, Léon being seated next to Saint-Luc, at

once covered the modest napoleon staked by his friend.

Saint-Luc won, and left the two gold pieces on the table, and Léon once more monopolised the play. The dealer won again, and again, and yet again, but at the fifth time the luck turned, and the young marquis had the satisfaction of receiving back the scraps of paper on which he had scribbled the amount of his debts, together with twenty francs of winnings.

'That is not the way to play lansquenet, my friend,' whispered Saint-Luc; but Léon, in answer to the good-natured warning, only shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and muttered, '*Je sais ce que je fais*,' which, if true, was a statement little creditable to his understanding. He put up forty francs and lost them immediately. Then, for a time, he got no chance of losing or winning, and sat drumming on the table and fidgeting restlessly in his chair after the manner of inexperienced gamblers, who are seldom contented unless they can be in the thick of the fray.

The game did not at first prove an exciting one. There were no long deals, very little money changed hands, and at the end of an hour the only player upon whom Fortune seemed to have

smiled at all was Saint-Luc, who had a little pile of gold before him; whereas Léon, whose few coins had long since vanished, had sent some three hundred francs worth of his signatures to different parts of the table, and was a little inclined to be querulous over his losses.

Poor Léon had not yet learnt that the first duty of a gambler is to preserve an aspect of equanimity, and that though men will bear with fools, and will even show marvellous patience with rogues, they will not tolerate one who bursts into lamentations over his bad luck. He offended in this way more than once in the course of the evening, but, perhaps, in consideration of his inexperience, he might have been allowed to escape unrebuked, had he not had the misfortune to fall foul of M. de Monceaux. That gentleman, who was no longer in his first youth, and had long since discovered that the pastimes of this world are but weariness and vexation of spirit, unless they can be made to conduce to its comforts, was accustomed in card-playing, as in all other pursuits, to regulate his conduct in accordance with certain well-defined principles. Throughout the evening he had been playing with more skill than good fortune, but he serenely bided his time,

knowing that to him who waits opportunity will surely arrive. Now it came to pass that Léon, in pursuance of his absurd system of doubling, had taken up the whole of the stake during a rather longer deal than usual. He was some distance away from the dealer, but none of the intervening players had cared to interfere with the young man after the first round, till some eight hundred francs were on the table. It was then that M. de Monceaux, having carefully calculated that the chances were now about ten to one in his favour, stepped in, and, in the exercise of his undoubted right as next player to the dealer, covered the whole sum, won it, and quietly swept it down.

'*C'est trop fort!*' exclaimed Léon, throwing himself back in his chair. And indeed it must be admitted that the incident was one which might have tried the patience of many an older man.

'I beg your pardon,' said de Monceaux suavely, bending forward as he spoke, 'you said something?'

Léon frowned, but made no reply.

'Perhaps,' continued de Monceaux, with increasing politeness, 'M. le Marquis has not often played this game. Am I wrong in conjecturing

from his manner that he believes me to have infringed some rule? In such a case he would do well to refer the matter to the committee of the club. Or if anything in my personal conduct should have displeased M. le Marquis, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to——'

'Nonsense!' interposed Saint-Luc hastily. 'Nobody is complaining of you, de Monceaux; and we are all waiting for you to deal.'

De Monceaux shrugged his shoulders, picked up the cards, won three times running, and then took down his gains.

'I trust M. le Marquis does not object to the deal passing,' he remarked, as he handed the pack to his neighbour.

'I object to nothing,' returned Léon, wrathfully; 'but this I must say——'

He was cut short by a smart blow across his shins. Saint-Luc had opened his long legs like a pair of scissors and bestowed this gentle correction impartially on his right hand and on his left.

'Be quiet, Léon,' he muttered; and then, turning to de Monceaux, 'Hold your tongue, you old fire-eater, and don't quarrel with boys. If you must fight, come out with me to-morrow

morning, and you shall see whether I am still as good a match for you as I used to be with the foils at Saint-Cyr.'

At this de Monceaux, who was a good-natured fellow enough, laughed and said, 'No, thank you,' and so peace was restored.

Often afterwards Saint-Luc wondered whether it was destiny or mere absence of mind that led him to begin his deal by putting up so large a stake as two hundred francs. He had hitherto taken little interest in the game, having altogether failed to find sufficient excitement therein to divert his thoughts from the channel in which they had so steadily run of late; and though the corporeal presence of the Vicomte de Saint-Luc had been visible at the card-table, pale, handsome, imperturbable, staking according to the dictates of prudence and winning moderately—the man himself had been wandering sadly enough in distant places—under the stars at Fort Napoléon, in the garden of the Campagne de Mersac, through the empty rooms of his own deserted Norman chateau—who knows where? The little dispute between Léon and de Monceaux had brought him back to realities for a moment, but now he had drifted away again, and pushed up the ten gold

pieces mechanically, forgetting, perhaps, that he was no longer in Paris, but in an Algerian club, where such sums were more or less of a phenomenon.

Léon immediately covered the stake. The occurrences of the last five minutes had not tended to soothe the irritability of that foolish young man, or to bring him to a calmer and wiser frame of mind. He was angry with himself, which was reasonable enough; he was very angry with de Monceaux, which was perhaps excusable; but it was certainly most unjust of him to be furious against Saint-Luc, who had just got him out of an awkward scrape. It must, however, be admitted that gratitude for such good offices is seldom forthcoming upon the spur of the moment. But, lastly, and most foolishly of all, Léon was indignant with Luck; and it was with an insane determination to conquer that pitiless abstraction that he pushed a slip of paper representing two hundred francs in front of Saint-Luc's ten napoleons, and lost it Four hundred, then eight hundred, then sixteen hundred francs went the same way. Saint-Luc went on dealing, and Léon set his teeth and continued to stake.

The rest of the players, being thus debarred

from taking any part in the game, looked on with calmness not unmixed with disgust.

When a man begins his deal by putting up two hundred francs, it is natural to expect that the greater part of the company may be able to secure some interest in the result, or failing that, that they may at least have the consolation of witnessing an exciting contest between him and the adventurous gambler who has chosen to oppose him alone. But in the present instance there was no prospect of any such solace. It was evident enough that Saint-Luc did not choose to win his friend's money; that he would go on till he lost; that the original stake would be the only sum that would change hands, and that the turning up of card after card was, therefore, a pure waste of time.

'I will never sit down to a card-table with that young imbecile again,' muttered de Monceaux to his neighbour. To which the other replied—

'Nor I—unless he likes to play with me alone.'

Meanwhile Saint-Luc was having a run of good fortune such as had not been witnessed in that club for many a long day. Time after time the dealer's card came up victorious, and some lan-

guid interest began to be manifested in the large amount of money on the table, which had now reached no less a sum than fifty thousand francs odd. The figures might be nearly nominal, still more than one person present felt a thrill on seeing before him the palpable result of a two hundred francs' stake and nine successive wins. A few bets were exchanged as to how long the luck would hold; and when Léon, with hands that trembled a little, added another piece of paper to those already before the dealer, thus making up a total of over one hundred thousand francs, there was a general hush and expectancy, and all eyes were turned upon the dealer.

Saint-Luc, impassive and indifferent, took the pack in his hand and turned up the first two cards—two tens. There was a general stir and hum, and somebody called out—

'The dealer takes down half the stakes.'

'Not unless he likes, I think,' said Saint-Luc, looking up. 'I prefer to leave it as it is.'

'You have no choice,' said de Monceaux. 'We made it a rule here long ago that where two cards of equal value were turned up, the dealer must either take down the whole stake and let the deal pass, or half of it, and continue to deal.'

'I never heard of such a rule in Paris,' answered Saint-Luc, manifestly annoyed.

'It is the rule here though,' persisted de Monceaux. 'We had several discussions about the matter, and we all agreed that it would be more satisfactory to oblige the dealer to take advantage of exceptionally favourable circumstances. There were some people who felt a delicacy — you understand.'

Of course there was nothing more to be said. If you play in a club you must conform to its rules, however absurd. Saint-Luc, with a slightly clouded brow, withdrew paper to the amount of fifty one thousand two hundred francs. The like amount remaining on the table was at once covered by Léon, whose agitation had now passed his powers of concealment. Come what might, he must now lose over two thousand pounds, and how to raise the money he scarcely knew.

Saint-Luc turned up the next two cards—two sevens! Léon might have used any language he pleased about his luck now without fear of shocking anyone's sense of propriety. The sympathies of the whole company were with him, and found vent in a subdued murmur which circled round the

table. It was indeed a more cruel blow than any man could have anticipated that he should not only lose his money twice running through an altogether exceptional coincidence, but that he should lose it to a man who had plainly shown that he did not desire to win it. Léon, however, held his peace. He had defied luck, and had got thoroughly beaten; the shock had stunned and sobered him at the same time. One thing only remained for him to do. He once more covered the dealer's stake, and, resting his head on his hand, awaited the end.

What that end would be no one could doubt. The appearance of another tie would have been little short of a miracle; the dealer had already won eleven times in succession, and the chances against his doing so again were almost incalculable. Moreover, it was quite clear that he intended to go on till he should lose. Léon himself could not but perceive this; yet his hands grew cold and his heart thumped as Saint-Luc proceeded to turn up the cards—a nine for himself and a two for his antagonist. With calm, almost cruel, deliberation, and in a profound silence, the Vicomte went on through the pack. Ten—king—three—five—would it never come? Some-

body in the distance slammed a door, and Saint-Luc paused for a moment and looked over his shoulder. Then he continued as slowly as before. Eight—six—ace—seven—four—*nine*! For the twelfth time the stake had fallen to the dealer.

'And I who never, in the course of a long and eventful career, have won as much as six times running!' exclaimed de Monceaux, naturally indignant at such a waste of Fortune's best gifts. '*Mon cher,*' he added, turning to Saint-Luc, 'I propose to you that we start to-morrow for Monaco. I will get a week's leave from my general; I will watch your play and humbly follow it, and I will return here rich enough to offer the best dinner that Algiers can produce to all the company.'

But Saint-Luc paid no attention to him. He glanced round the table, looked rather oddly for an instant at Leon's pale face and flashing eyes, and then, gathering together the accumulation of paper before him, delivered up the cards to his neighbour, remarking calmly, as he leant back in his chair, 'The deal passes.'

The reader may, perhaps, at some time have happened to watch two dogs playing at fighting —snapping, snarling, showing glistening fangs,

and rolling one another over in the dust, but all the time with an evident tacit understanding that there was no real quarrel between them. And then he may have seen one of them, with a swift, sudden change from play into grim earnest, fasten upon the other and kill him then and there, before even the poor brute has had time to understand what is happening to him. Greyhounds, collies, and other sharp-nosed dogs will do so sometimes. Anyone who has witnessed such a little tragedy, and recollects what his feelings were at the time towards the murderer, may form an idea of the light in which Saint-Luc's unexpected action caused him to be regarded by those who sat at the table with him. No one spoke—indeed, there was nothing to be said ; what had been done was strictly in accordance with the rules of the game ; but there was not a man present who did not feel that the poor young marquis had been not only cruelly treated by his friend, but morally defrauded. Who could suppose that he would have gone on staking in the mad way he had done if he had not shared the general conviction that his enormous losses were not meant to be serious ? And the fact that Saint-Luc had actually won over four thousand pounds already made his con-

duct the more inexcusable. In the first glow of their generous sympathy and indignation, these young fellows would willingly have placed their purses at the disposition of the victim, though, to be sure, that would have helped but little, for not one of them could have paid a twentieth part of what he owed.

Léon, in this trying crisis of his life, bore himself with a dignity and fortitude which at once blotted out the memory of his previous petulance. He rose slowly, and stood for a moment, resting his hands upon the table and looking round him. To his dying day Léon will remember that scene. The great airy room, with its polished floor and its lace curtains swaying in the night breeze; the green card-table flooded with soft light from above, the gold-laced staff-uniforms and the pale blue jackets of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, the circle of curious, startled, upturned faces, de Monceaux frowning a little and twisting his waxed moustache, Saint-Luc staring steadily before him, with a countenance devoid of any expression whatever—all these, together with a dozen other petty details, make up a picture which Léon can summon up at will, and which has often revisited him when he would have

been very glad to forget it. He remembers, too, the odd feeling of unreality which took hold of him, the half doubt as to his own identity, his wonder at finding his voice so clear and steady and under control.

'I think I will go away now,' he said. 'I have lost a good deal of money—rather more than I can afford. I shall be able to pay everybody to-morrow, except M. de Saint-Luc, whom I shall have to ask for a little time.' In truth the poor lad hardly knew what he was saying, but felt only that something must be said, and that he must not disgrace himself. He paused—then bowing, added, 'Good-night, messieurs,' and walked across the room and out of the house.

Those who were left sat in silence till his echoing footsteps died away in the distance, and then de Monceaux remarked, 'That young man will go and drown himself.'

'No, he will not,' answered Saint-Luc, with a quiet smile. 'He is a brave fellow, and will turn out well yet.'

'Parbleu!—if you have left him the means, he may,' returned de Monceaux, rather roughly, for he was disgusted at his friend's cynicism.

Saint-Luc turned in his chair, so as to face

the aide-de-camp, and looked him full in the eyes. 'A little time ago,' he said, 'you were ready to kill young de Mersac because he did not seem satisfied with your manner of playing. Do you want to quarrel with me now for following your example?'

'I seek no quarrels, and refuse none,' replied de Monceaux, curtly. 'For the moment I am going home to bed; I have had enough of play for one night.' And so saying, he rose, buckled on his sword, and strode away.

Perhaps he was not sorry to escape without further words. Had it been a question of challenging any other man than Saint-Luc, he might have been less placable, but he knew that he might as well stand up against a mitrailleuse as against that notorious duellist. And, after all, it was not his business to fight other men's battles. His departure was the signal for a general move, and presently Saint-Luc found himself the sole tenant of the club.

Léon, meanwhile, had wandered out into the street, with no very distinct idea as to where he was or what he intended to do. After a time he found himself sitting on one of the benches in the empty Place du Gouvernement, and, taking

out a pencil and a bit of paper, began to add up his losses. The calculation did not take long. To de Monceaux and one or two other players he owed some small sums amounting in all to something over fifty pounds, and to Saint-Luc exactly two hundred and fifty-five thousand eight hundred francs. For a long time he sat staring stupidly at the figures, and struggling in vain to realise the magnitude of the catastrophe that had occurred; then, all of a sudden, the true nature of his position seemed to flash across him with horrible distinctness. He was very nearly ruined. Every invested penny he had in the world would not realise the required amount. He had sold out a large portion of his patrimony since he had come of age, acting under good advice in so doing, and expending the ready money thus acquired in the purchase of fresh land and in farm improvements. Within the last few months he had bought a great many costly agricultural machines, which would, he was convinced, make him a richer man in the long run, though it was only too certain that, if sold at the present time, they would not fetch half their value. Upon the whole, it would cost him a great deal more than ten thousand pounds to pay Saint-Luc. Nor was there anyone

to whom he could apply for temporary aid. The Duchess had only a life-interest in her income, M. de Fontvieille had long since sunk his small fortune in an annuity, and Jeanne's share of her father's estate was, of course, held in trust for her. What was to be done? Léon could see nothing for it but that he must sell his house and part of his lands for what they would fetch, and retire to that lonely farm on the Metidja plain of which mention has already been made. Jeanne, he thought, might live, till her marriage, with the Duchess, who would now have to seek a new home. It was all very hard, poor Léon could not help thinking. A man makes a fool of himself during one brief half-hour, and is crippled for the rest of his life. Surely the punishment is out of all proportion to the offence! And not the least part of his misery was the anticipation of the story he would have to relate at home in the course of a few hours. How should he ever bring himself to tell what must be told? Could he call his sister, who had devoted her whole life to him, and the kindly, worldly, fussy old woman who had treated him with all a mother's fondness, if not with quite a mother's discretion, and who had spoilt, admired, and idolised him from his cradle

—could he face them, and say, 'My good people, I am very sorry, but you will have to leave your old home, and the familiar rooms, and the garden, and the orchard, and the woods that you loved, and look out for some much less spacious habitation. I lost a small fortune at lansquenet last night, and now I have got to sell house and land, and make a fresh start. As for you, you will be a little pinched; you will have to economise here and there, and do without some of the small luxuries which you have come to consider as necessaries. I shall not be able to live with you myself——'

'My God! I can't do it!' broke off poor Léon aloud.

And then, for a moment, some such thought as that which had occurred to de Monceaux did cross his mind. Yonder lay the sea, calm, silent, and grey with the first glimmer of dawn. It would be easy enough to take a boat and row out beyond the breakwater, after sunrise, and bathe. The best of swimmers may be seized with cramp—there would be no scandal. But here common sense stepped in, and pointed out that in this direction lay no hope of honourable escape. It was certain that Saint-Luc must be paid; and

Léon, even if he avoided the grief and shame of meeting those dearest to him again, must leave them, as a legacy, some record of his debt. He tried to summon up all his courage, and said to himself that since he was obliged to do what he would rather die than do, he would at least go through it without flinching. He would tell his story in as few words as possible, he thought, and get it over. There would be no use in weeping, or execrating his folly, or entreating for pardon. They would understand better than he could express to them how miserable he was. Yes, he would tell Jeanne first and then the Duchess, and in ten minutes it would all be done. He had heard of surgical operations which had lasted much longer than that, and men had lived through them, and been able to speak of them calmly in after years. But when he pictured to himself what would follow—the Duchess's tears and lamentations, as she made her preparations for departure—Jeanne moving silently from room to room, packing and arranging, with a grave, sorrowful face, worse than any outspoken reproach, his fortitude gave way, and throwing his arms over the back of the bench he hid his face in them and groaned.

After a time some one came behind him and touched him gently on the shoulder.

He started up, and saw Saint-Luc.

'Oh, is it you, Saint-Luc?' said he, in a hurried, confused manner. 'I will be with you directly. I must just speak to my sister and the Duchess —it will not take ten minutes—and then I will come back. I have added up what I owe you, and it comes to two hundred and fifty-five thousand eight hundred francs, I think. I shall be able to pay you before very long; but you will understand that it takes a little time.'

Saint-Luc did not reply, but, passing his arm through Léon's, led him away towards the Hôtel d'Orient. The young man made no resistance till they had reached the door, then he started and drew back. 'Where are we?' he asked, pushing his hat back from his forehead. 'This is your hotel, is it not? I think I must have fallen asleep. I must be going home now.'

'Not at this hour,' said Saint-Luc, quietly. 'It is morning already, and you would disturb them. You can have the bedroom next to mine, and if you have anything to say about money matters, we will discuss it at breakfast. In the

meantime, the best thing you can do is to take off your clothes and get to sleep.'

The young man made some faint effort at opposition, but he was too confused and weary to hold out long; and half an hour afterwards he was in bed, sleeping as soundly as if the events of the evening had been merely a troubled dream.

Saint-Luc peeped in at him presently through the half-open door, and then stealing away on tip-toe to his own window, lighted a cigar and watched the sun rise from behind the shadowy Djurdjura range.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE *v.* PRUDENCE.

LÉON'S non-appearance at breakfast did not give rise to any anxiety at the Campagne de Mersac. In that easy-going household no one was expected to give an account of him or herself before the dinner-hour; and, as for its master, if, as often happened, business or pleasure took him into the country for a day or two at a time, it was only by chance that he gave notice of his intended absence. Jeanne, therefore, when she heard from Fanchette that M. le Marquis had not returned on the previous evening, felt no misgivings as to her brother's safety, but only some slight disappointment; for the Duchess, who had aged a good deal of late, seldom showed herself now before three o'clock, and eating alone is dull work at the best of times. Jeanne, who was not of an age or temperament to care about food for its own sake, soon disposed of her solitary repast. She took a

book into the dining-room with her, hastily swallowed, while she read, such amount of sustenance as seemed necessary to support life, and then stepped out on to the verandah.

It was a cloudless summer morning; the town below was baking and sweltering in the heat, but here, on the breezy hill top, little puffs of cool wind rose and fell, bending the heads of the roses and the stiff white lilies, driving the spray of the fountain across the gravel walks, and rousing a soft sleepy whispering among the pine branches. The winter and spring were at an end; the rains were done with now till October at earliest, and soon the long, weary, hot season would set in, and the grass would grow browner day by day, and the leaves would wither on the trees, and the spikes of the aloes blacken and fall, and there would be no more roses, and every babbling stream would be silenced. But as yet the woods and meadows were still of a vivid green, the garden was ablaze with flowers, many-coloured butterflies fluttered and poised themselves over the beds, little bright-eyed lizards darted hither and thither upon the stone-walls. All nature was astir and rejoicing in the sunshine and warmth; and the heat was not too great for comfort, but

only sufficient to afford a good excuse for idleness.

Jeanne, who was by no means an idle person, had got through her day's duties long ago. She had ordered the dinner, added up her accounts, visited the animals, read aloud to the Duchess for an hour, and had now earned the right to drop into a rocking-chair and rest. She swayed gently to and fro, one foot resting on the ground, and presently her book slipped from her hand and she began to dream. Facing her, beyond the glittering blue bay and the sultry haze of the plain, rose the distant purple mountains behind whose shadowy folds and ridges Fort Napoléon lay hidden. Was M. de Saint-Luc still there? she wondered, or was he even now wending his way homewards, lonely and disconsolate? Poor M. de Saint-Luc! Jeanne had never known how much she really liked him till she had found herself obliged to deal him the cruellest blow that a woman can inflict upon a man. Remembering, with a pang of conscience, how unjust she had been to him, how she had snubbed him and tried to hurt his feelings, and with what quiet patience he had borne it all, she could almost have found it in her heart to wish that it had been possible to

her to give him a different answer. But that could never have been; and since things were as they were, how much better it was that he should have spoken out and heard the truth. She would be able to treat him as a friend now; there would be no more misunderstanding; and probably he, on his side, would abstain from uttering those wearisome, laboured compliments which had sometimes made his presence positively hateful to her. 'If he had only known,' thought Jeanne, 'what a foolish thing flattery is, and how it disgusts all sensible people! How different Mr. Barrington is! With him one can talk and feel at one's ease; he does not sigh and roll his eyes, and nauseate one with silly speeches.'

But when Jeanne reached this point in her soliloquy, a slight conscious smile rose to her eyes and lips, and the faintest flush in the world appeared upon her cheeks. For the truth was that Mr. Barrington had spent the greater part of the preceding day with her, and had said some very flattering things indeed. But then, to be sure, they had not been silly—or she had not thought so. Alas! one man may steal a horse and another must not look over a hedge. Who gets justice in this world? And, for the matter of that, who

wants it? If some people rate us below our proper value, others, no doubt, think of us more highly than we deserve; and were it possible to strike a balance and induce everybody to view our failings and merits with the same eyes, all the sunshine would fade out of life, and a dull business become duller yet. As for Barrington, he has been over-estimated on all hands throughout his life, and will doubtless continue to be so to the end of the chapter. Here was Mademoiselle de Mersac, who was worth a thousand of him, thinking over his wise and witty sayings, dwelling upon his many accomplishments, mentally recapitulating the long talks she had had with him during that Kabylian excursion and since, and finding so much pleasure in this employment that she failed to note the passage of time, and was quite startled when a clock in the room behind her struck two. Then, remembering that she had some work to take to the sisters at the neighbouring convent, she rose, with a half sigh, fetched her hat and a huge white umbrella, and whistling to Turco, moved slowly away in the hot sunshine.

Five minutes' walk across the dusty high road and through a corn-field brought her to the vast, white, dreary building, with its long rows of small

windows and its arched gateway surmounted by an iron cross. One of the sisters peered at her through a lattice, and then opened the door and let her into the cool gloom of the hall. Turco stretched himself out upon the doorstep, and panted, and snapped at the flies.

When Jeanne emerged, half an hour afterwards, and gazed with dazzled eyes into the blinding glare without, she became aware of somebody on a chestnut horse who dismounted as she drew nearer to him, and took off his hat, exclaiming, 'So you have come at last! I saw your dog at the door, and I thought I would wait for you; but you were such a long, long time in appearing that I began to be afraid that you were not in the convent after all.'

'How do you do, Mr. Barrington?' said Jeanne, holding out her hand in her grave, composed way. 'I am sorry that you waited in the heat.'

'Why are you sorry? For my sake, or for your own? If I am a bore, I will go away.'

'Oh, no!' answered Jeanne, smiling a little. 'On the contrary, I am very glad to see you; only if I had known you were there, I would have come out sooner. I was chatting with old Sister Marthe, who is fond of a gossip, and I

always like the convent, it is so quiet and peaceful there.'

'Isn't it a little like a prison?' asked Barrington, glancing back at the cold, bare structure. He had passed his arm through his horse's bridle, and was walking beside Jeanne towards the high road.

'I do not find it so,' she answered. 'Often I think that I shall end by taking the veil.'

'Good gracious, how horrible!' exclaimed Barrington aghast. 'What can have put such an idea into your head? You, of all people! Why, you would not be able to bear the life for a week.'

'How can you tell that?' asked Jeanne, raising her grave eyes to his for a moment. 'You have not seen the life, and perhaps you do not know very well what would suit me. I think I could be happy enough in a convent; all the sisters are contented. I do not speak of the present, of course; I have other things to do—Léon to look after, and Madame de Breuil. But changes will come: Léon will marry, and the Duchess is very old. One must think of the future sometimes.'

'I hope,' said Barrington, 'that the future

has some brighter destiny than that in store for you.'

She made no reply, and the pair walked on silently side by side for another hundred yards or so. Barrington, when he alluded to the possibility of some bright future destiny for his companion, had a very distinct idea in his own mind of what he wished that destiny to be, but he had not yet quite decided that he would offer it to her. Or rather, though he believed his decision to be firm, and, indeed, had declared to himself more than once during the past four-and-twenty hours that it was so, he was not quite sure that he would take the present opportunity of revealing it. He was generally considered to be an impetuous, enthusiastic, romantic sort of fellow; but those who knew him best were aware that his character contained, by way of counterpoise, a strong underlying vein of prudence; and, moreover, that this prudence had a way of coming forward just in the nick of time, and had on many occasions snatched back its favoured possessor from the very brink of some rash action. He was very much in love with Jeanne de Mersac—more so, he thought, than he had ever been with any woman; but then he was also very much in love with himself,

and the latter attachment, being of longer standing, was probably more deeply seated than the former. He would not, of course, have admitted this—indeed, he considered himself to be a man of singularly unselfish proclivities—but he had always looked upon marriage as a very serious step indeed, and one not to be taken without much forethought and deliberation. Without having given the subject any very profound consideration, he had nevertheless been, for some years past, pretty firmly convinced that, when the time should come for him to take a wife, his wisest course would be to select a lady for whom he could feel a sincere respect and esteem without having any romantic affection for her. The eldest Miss Ashley might do, or Lady Jane East, or one of the Fetherston girls. Any one of these ladies, and a good many others too, would, as he was aware, be persuaded without difficulty to share his humble lot, and dispense the hospitalities of Broadridge Court. The very best kind of wife obtainable—so Barrington had thought—was a woman neither above nor beneath her husband in rank, neither strikingly handsome nor absolutely plain, neither too clever nor too stupid—a woman who would dress well and manage her household properly, and

keep on good terms with the neighbours, and raise no objection if her husband proposed to leave her for a few months at a time while he sought a relaxation in a yachting or shooting trip. Such had been his not very lofty ideal, and to it he had remained faithful through many a desperate flirtation. And was he now to throw all prudence to the winds for the sake of this pale, stately girl, whom he knew to be proud and fond of her own way, who might not improbably prove exacting, and who was a Frenchwoman and a Roman Catholic? He had put this question to himself, with some anxiety, the night before, and had finally answered it in the affirmative. True love, he thought, should be strong enough to survive sacrifices, and if any such should be called for from him, was she not worth them? He would find an opportunity of seeing her the next day, and would tell her all. A tinge of uncertainty as to what her reply might be contributed to strengthen this heroic determination. And yet, now that the propitious moment had come, he found himself doubting, hesitating, weighing the old pros and cons over again. The upshot of it all was that when he broke the silence, it was only to say:—

'I suppose you will be at the Governor-General's ball to-night?'

'Yes, I think so. Madame de Vaublanc has offered to take me. And you?'

'I shall certainly go if you do.'

Then there was another pause, which lasted until the gates of the Campagne were reached.

'May I come in?' asked Barrington. 'I want to consult your brother about my horse, who has not been feeding properly for the last day or two. I fancy the heat affects him.'

The pretext was a sufficiently shallow one, but it answered its purpose.

'Yes, pray do,' answered Jeanne. 'I am not sure whether Léon is at home, but I will find out.'

She lifted a small silver whistle which she carried at her belt, and blew a shrill summons upon it, in answer to which one of the Arab grooms presently came running out.

'Yes,' the man said, in answer to his mistress's inquiry, 'M. le Marquis had returned, and had asked for mademoiselle; but, hearing that she was out, he had ridden away again.'

'I daresay he will be back before long,' Jeanne remarked. 'Shall we go into the house and wait for him? It is too hot to sit out of doors.'

Barrington followed her into the cool, darkened drawing-room, and, sinking into an easy-chair by her side, let his eyes roam abstractedly over the glazed tiles, the Persian rugs, the low divans, the nooks and recesses which had become so familiar to him. The piano had been left open, with a piece of music on the desk; his own picture of Jeanne on the balcony stood on an easel in one corner; on every table were vases and bowls filled with roses.

'What a charming room this is!' he exclaimed.

'Yes, it is a nice room,' said Jeanne. Barrington had made the same remark so many times before that the subject appeared to her to be pretty well exhausted.

'How commonplace and vulgar English houses will look to me after this!' he went on. 'My own drawing-room is tastefully furnished with white and green-striped satin; the carpet is white, with gigantic ferns and cabbage-roses sprawling over it, and the paper, which also has a white ground, exhibits a series of wonderful green birds sitting in gold cages. I often think it is the most appallingly hideous room I ever beheld.'

'Why do you not re-furnish it then?' asked Jeanne, laughing.

'I suppose I shall one of these days. Just now it would be hardly worth while, for nobody ever enters it. The rest of the house is well enough, and I have an affection for the old place, though it is dreary work living there all alone. I wonder whether *you* would like it?'

Jeanne not feeling herself called upon to hazard any conjecture as to whether Mr. Barrington's house were likely to please her or not, he resumed presently, 'I am sure you would like the garden. People tell me that the turf at Broadridge is the oldest in the county, and we have always been famous for our roses. There are some fine old trees in the park too. I should like you to see it all. Isn't there a chance of your paying your cousins a visit some time or other?'

'Not very much, I am afraid,' answered Jeanne. 'They have asked me several times, and I have always wished to go to England; but it is difficult for me to get away, especially in the summer, for then I go to Switzerland with the Duchess, and, as Léon does not accompany us, it would be impossible for me to leave her.'

'To Switzerland? Dear me! I was thinking of going to Switzerland myself this summer,' said Barrington, who had not until that moment had

any intention of the sort. 'I wonder whether we are likely to meet.'

Jeanne's face brightened perceptibly. 'I hope we may,' she replied cordially. 'Shall you be there in August, do you think? *À propos*, when do you go back to England?'

'I am not sure that I shall go back at all,' answered Barrington slowly. 'I hate London, and I don't want to go home. Why should I not stay here, and start when you do? Perhaps I might be of some service to you on the journey.'

'Oh, how delightful that would be!' exclaimed Jeanne, half involuntarily, clasping her hands.

And then Barrington suddenly lost his head. He saw that perfect pale face bent towards him, with parted lips and soft brown eyes with a glad light in them; he saw a blue dress upon which a stray shaft of sunlight fell, and a glittering silver necklace and a pair of joined hands, and he forgot everything except that he was alone with Jeanne, and that he loved her better than the whole world. Good-bye, caution! Good-bye, prudence and hesitation and cold common sense! He caught her hands in his, stammering in his eagerness, 'Would it be delightful? Would you think it delightful?'

She drew back with a troubled, startled look.

'What do you mean?' she murmured. 'I—I do not understand——'

'Don't you understand that, if you will only speak one word, I will never leave you again? Don't you understand——'

At this most interesting and critical juncture a tap upon the tiles and the sound of an opening door caused the speaker to break off abruptly. He wheeled round just in time to see the Duchess de Breuil make her entrance, leaning upon her stick.

Happily, the old lady's powers both of hearing and vision had become a good deal impaired of late; otherwise she could scarcely have failed to remark the agitation of the couple whose *tête-à-tête* she had so inopportunely disturbed. As it was, she noticed nothing, and sank back into her chair with some amiable expressions of the pleasure that it gave her to find Mr. Barrington in the room. She had taken a fancy to the Englishman, whom she had discovered to be not only a fair French scholar and a man of the world, but, what was better still, a patient listener; and, as she was in a good humour that afternoon, and felt garrulously disposed, she graciously made a sign to him to take a chair by her side, and began to talk

politics. She had been reading the newspapers upstairs, she said, and from what she had been able to gather, it appeared to her that a crisis was imminent in France. That poor M. Bonaparte, with his *plébiscites* and his Olliviers, his caricatures of constitutional government, his failing health, and his disreputable relations, who carried revolvers in their pockets and murdered casual visitors, was evidently near the term of his rule. 'They have begun to laugh at him already,' said the old lady, nodding her head sagaciously; 'and believe me, monsieur, when a man is laughed at in France it is time for him to pack up his trunks. You will see that before long we shall have a Red Republic; and when that has lasted a few months, the nation will return to its allegiance, and the king will ascend the throne of his fathers at last. Ah, I am an old woman, monsieur, and I have seen many things, and I know what my compatriots are. There was a time when I myself had some influence over the course of politics; but that is long ago, and everybody has forgotten all about it now. M. de Talleyrand, who scarcely ever missed one of my Thursdays, used to say that my *salon* was the only one in Paris in which he could count upon meeting everybody whom he wanted to see. That was when we lived in the

Rue Saint-Dominique, and my poor husband was Garde des Sceaux.' And so forth, and so forth.

Barrington bore it all with exemplary patience. A very small proportion of the Duchess's recollections reached his understanding; but he continued to look as if he were all attention, and, while he encouraged her to prattle on, stole occasional furtive glances at Jeanne, who was sitting a little apart, her hands loosely clasped on her lap, and a little bewilderment still visible in her face, but withal a certain soft joyousness which lent a new and wondrous charm to her beauty, and caused the heart of her wooer to beat high with happiness and hope.

He rose to go at length, and, as he bade her good-bye, held her hand a little longer than he need have done, and whispered, 'Till to-night, then.'

She said nothing, but raised her eyes to his for a moment, and dropped them again. And then he knew that he had got his answer.

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